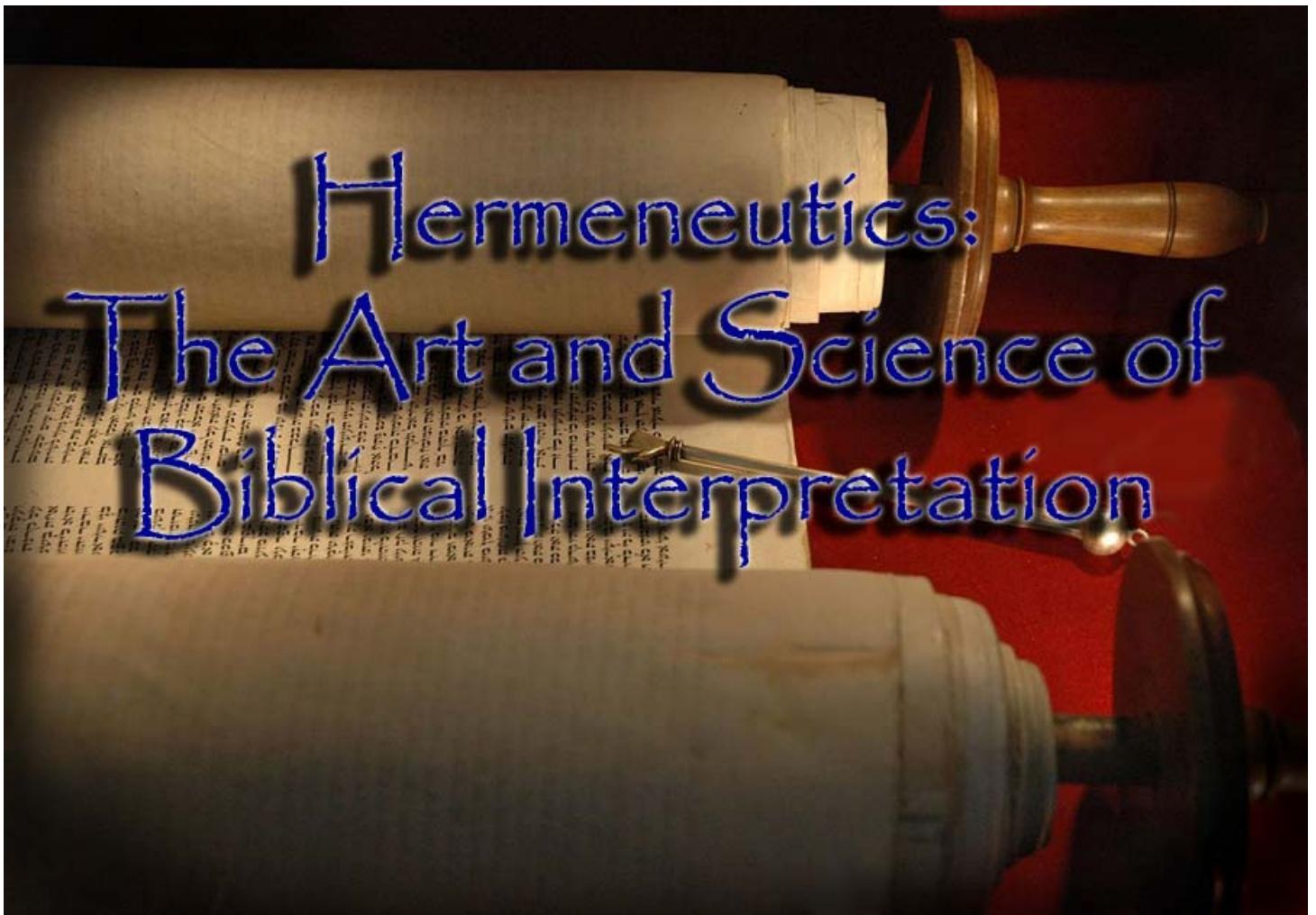


# Theology for Life

Volume 4 | Issue 1 | Spring 2017



## Inside this Issue...

- *Biblical Meditation as Experiential Reading*
- *What is Biblical Preaching?*
- *Hermeneutics, Preaching, and the Problem with Biblical Illiteracy*

To be faithful in this time,  
the Church must be a  
haven of hope, a refuge in  
the midst of sexual chaos.



—TREVIN WAX

@TrevinWax

#ThisIsOurTime

*This Is Our Time*

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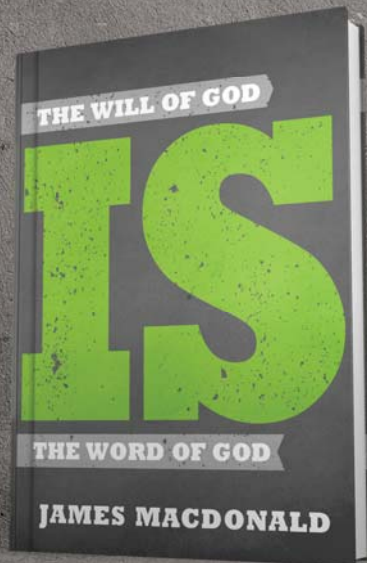
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# IS GOD'S WILL TOP- SECRET?

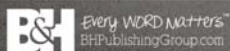


When it comes to God's will, you may live in fear that He is holding out on you somehow. Yet, the Bible clearly reveals God's will for your life. You only need to listen.

When it comes to discovering God's will, author and pastor James MacDonald finds historic misunderstandings among Christians:

- "Can you ever be sure about what God wants you to do?"
- "What if you discover you've been doing something other than His will?"
- "If you somehow stepped out of God's will at some point, can you ever get back on track, or is your situation hopeless?"

Are you in God's will now? Is a confident answer to that question ever possible?



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## Editor's Corner

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**Is the Bible true? Does it ever err? And does its morality still matter? Many Christians ask these questions in a sincere effort to grow in their faith, but others, armed with common claims of biblical contradictions, scientific inaccuracies, and outdated sexual morality, do so out of sheer unbelief. Despite these questions being sufficiently answered on numerous occasions, still, they persist.**

**Researchers George Gallup and Jim Castelli put the problem squarely: “Americans revere the Bible—but, by and large, they don’t read it. And because they don’t read it, they have become a nation of biblical illiterates.” How bad is it? Researchers tell us that it’s worse than most could imagine.**

***Fewer than half of all adults can name the four Gospels. Many Christians cannot identify more than two or three of the disciples. According to data from the Barna Research Group, 60% of Americans can’t name even five of the Ten Commandments. “No wonder people break the Ten Commandments all the time. They don’t know what they are,” said George Barna, president of the firm. The bottom line? “Increasingly, America is biblically illiterate.”***

**A recent study conducted by Lifeway Research and sponsored by Ligonier Ministries produced a study called *The State of Theology*. This report tells us a lot about contemporary evangelicals and their beliefs. On one part of this study, they asked responders to agree or disagree to the statement, “The Bible alone is the written Word of God.” Thirty percent agreed strongly, 18 agreed somewhat, 19 percent disagree somewhat, 19 percent disagree strongly, and 12 percent aren’t sure. Self-identified evangelicals who attend church once a month or more (79%) are more likely to Strongly Agree than other Christians (27%) and Non-Christians (11%). Evangelicals (62%) are more likely to Strongly Agree than Black Protestants (46%), Catholics (17%), and Mainlines (22%). The next part of the study considered the following statement, “The Bible is 100% accurate in all that it teaches.” 27 percent agreed strongly with this statement, 16 agreed somewhat, 21 percent disagreed somewhat, 25 percent disagree strongly, and 12 percent aren’t sure (16). Self-identified evangelicals who attend church once a month or more (78%) are more likely to Strongly Agree than Other Christians (23%) and Non-Christians (9%). Evangelicals (61%) are more likely to Strongly Agree than Black Protestants (43%), Catholics (12%), and Mainlines (17%).**

**In addition to these alarming statics, we are living in a**

time when biblical illiteracy is at epidemic levels. In this issue of *Theology for Life Magazine*, you will learn the art and skill of hermeneutics. Along the way, you will learn how to engage biblical interpretation and discover how it affects your Christian life and ministry.

The need for Christians to understand the art and skill of biblical interpretation has never been greater in the history of the Church. We are living in a time defined by the Oxford dictionary as an era of “post-truth”, where everyone claims “my truth, and I will stand by it.” Such claims though don’t pass the smell test. For truth to stand, it must be based *not* upon what we *feel*, which is fickle, but on objective truth. In a post-truth era, Christians stand firm not on “my truth and I’ll stand on it”, but on the objective standard and authority of the Word. As Christians, we believe this truth wholeheartedly and are called to mine its depth to proclaim it’s riches to the world.

To interpret the Bible rightly, we must believe the right things about it—namely that it is the inspired, inerrant, sufficient, and authoritative Word. For this to happen, God must take our hearts of stone and replace it with a new heart, with new desires, and affections for Himself. In this process, He gives us the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Truth who points His people to the truth about Jesus, convicts them of that truth, and helps them to love and walk in the truth.

Everyone, regardless of their education, can learn to read and interpret the Bible well. It is our hope with this issue that you will be equipped to read, study, and interpret the Bible well so that you will grow in your walk with the Lord.

In Christ,  
Dave Jenkins  
Executive Editor of *Theology for Life Magazine*

#### References:

- i. *The State of the Bible Six Trends for 2014*, 8 April, 2014, accessed December 2016. <http://www.barna.com/research/the-state-of-the-bible-6-trends-for-2014/#.VkZeQr9xJpu>
- ii. Ibid.

## The Basics of Biblical Interpretation

By Dave Jenkins



***“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” (Luke 24:27)***

The word “interpreted” in Luke 24:27 comes from the Greek word

**διερμηνεύω**

(transliterated as **diermēneuō**), which means either to unfold the meaning of what is

said, explain, expound, or to translate into one's native language. Dr. Howard Marshall is correct when he notes that the, “root idea of explained is the word from which we derive the word hermeneutics, the science of biblical interpretation.”[i]

The Gospel of Luke finds its unity in the person of Jesus and in His mission to seek and save the lost. From the first announcement of His coming to His ascension into heaven, Jesus is at the center of everything: the songs are for His praise, the miracles are by His power, the teaching is from His wisdom, the conflict is over His claims, and the cross is that which only He could bear. Luke gives his account further literary unity by intertwining the stories of Jesus and John the Baptist; by beginning and ending His story at the temple; by presenting the life of Jesus as a journey towards Jerusalem; and by following the progress of the disciples as they learn to count the cost of discipleship. The unity of the Gospel of Luke is expressed in Jesus’ pronouncement to Zacchaeus: “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). The immediate context of Luke 24:13-35 fits within the broader context of Luke 24, which is about the Resurrection of Jesus. Luke’s Gospel began in the Temple (Luke 1:5-23) and, after Jesus rose from the dead, concludes in the temple as well (Luke 24:52-53). Luke has Jesus appearing to His disciples and then gives the Ascension of Jesus.

With the phrase “beginning with Moses and the Prophets” Jesus is highlighting



the entire Old Testament, summarized as all Scripture. Jesus explained to the men on the road to Emmaus not only the explicit prophecies about the Messiah, but also the historical patterns of God's activity throughout the Old Testament, and how they find fulfillment in Himself.

In the inscrutable wisdom of divine providence, the substance of Christ's exposition of the Old Testament messianic prophecies was not recorded. But the gift of what He expounded would have undoubtedly included an explanation of the Old Testament sacrificial system which was full of types and symbols that spoke of His sufferings and death. He also would have pointed them to the major prophetic passages which spoke of the crucifixion such as Psalm 16:9-11, 22; Isaiah 52:14-53:12; and Zechariah 12:10. He would have pointed out the true meaning of Genesis 3:15, Num-

"These prophecies also find their fulfillment in the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ..."

bers 21:6-9, Psalm 16:10, Jeremiah 23:5-6, Daniel 9:26, and a host of other key messianic prophecies, particularly those that spoke of His death and resurrection. The Lord interpreted all the Scriptures as pointing to Himself, showing how the Old Testament in various ways, pointed to Himself (Acts 10:43). J.C. Ryle is right: "The key to understanding the Bible is Jesus Christ."<sup>[ii]</sup> Jesus is the seed of the woman who was

bruised on the cross before crushing Satan's head. He is the Lamb who offered His blood for our sins (John 1:36) and was lifted up for our salvation (John 3:14-15). He is the covenant-maker who was cursed for our covenant breaking and who sprinkled His redeeming blood on the altar of the Cross (Galatians 3:13).

- If we turn to Isaiah, the Scriptures say that the Savior will be wounded for our iniquities and pierced for our transgressions (Isaiah 53:5).
- If we turn to Jeremiah, the Scriptures say that He will be mocked and abused (Jeremiah 20:7-10).
- If we turn to Zechariah, the Scriptures say that He will make atonement for the whole land in a single day (Zechariah 3:9).

These prophecies also find their fulfillment in the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, who was wounded, pierced, and abused in offering Himself as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. All of this was only the beginning.

Jesus continued His Bible exposition by using all the principles of His Christ-centered, gospel-driven interpretation to explain all that was said "in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). Jesus is not here or there in this prediction or prophecy: He is everywhere in the Old Testament. He is the Ark of the Covenant and the blood on the Mercy Seat. He is the Light on the Golden Lampstand and the Bread of Life. He is the Prophet who preaches like Moses, the Priest who prays like Aaron, and the King of David's heart.

### Learning from Jesus' Preaching Ministry

The basis for biblical interpretation begins with Jesus.

- Jesus' preaching was biblical: it was based on the law and the prophets.
- His preaching was thorough: He wanted His friends to know everything the Prophets had spoken.
- His preaching was Christ-centered, for He was preaching about Himself.
- His preaching was also gospel-centered including both the crucifixion and the resurrection: Jesus proclaimed the agonies of the cross and the glories of the empty tomb.
- His preaching was persuasive: He argued for the absolute necessity of doing His saving work the way that He did it—it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and then to be glorified.

"If we follow the model of Jesus on the road to Emmaus to His friends, our preaching will honor God..."

If we follow the model of Jesus on the road to Emmaus to His friends, our preaching will honor God, see the lost saved, the saints strengthened, and the Kingdom advanced. May God raise up such preachers who are unafraid and unashamed to preach the His Word and interpret all of Scripture in light of Jesus for His glory.

#### References:

- [i] I. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 897.
- [ii] William Hendrickson, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1978), 1065.
- [iii] J.C. Ryle, *Luke* (Illinois, Crossway, 1997), 311.

## Hermeneutics, Preaching, and the Problem with Biblical Illiteracy

By Jason Garwood

***“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15, ESV)***

When it comes to understanding the Christian life, knowing and applying the Bible is a non-negotiable: one simply cannot *do* Christianity *without* it. Not only is the Bible the foundation of all truth claims, it

is immensely practical. It is filled with God’s self-revelation, and it is filled with parameters by which man can live. To use Peter’s language, “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 2:13).

The problem comes in, of course, when we don’t see the Scriptures in this way. When a person chooses *not* to find in the Scriptures a wealth of knowledge and practical wisdom, he chooses the path of autonomy, which is paved with pride and ends in despair. The person who wishes to live his life abundantly in Christ must go to the Bible, under the illumination of the Spirit, as the source



and power for “life and godliness.”

And yet, we have problems in our churches, don’t we? We have Bible apps on our tablets and phones, as well as study bibles readily available with *Prime* shipping. We have resource after resource, and yet, the question is, are we better for it? Have we become more knowledgeable because of our access to the Word of God? Are we applying it in ways we never imagined because we have so many resources? It should be obvious to the reader that these are *rhetorical* questions.

As a pastor who preaches week in and week out, I find it rather disheartening that the level of biblical illiteracy seems to be at an all-time high. Stories from the Old Testament that used to be well-known are now unknown (it seems). You might well think pastors and teachers in the church are doing a horrible job! But that’s certainly not where *all* the blame should reside. If a person chooses not to take Paul’s admonition in 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2:15 seriously, that is, doing one’s best to present himself to God as one approved, handling the Scriptures properly, then it’s no wonder illiteracy is a problem in the pew. Which really means that it isn’t because of a lack of resources. No, illiteracy in the Scriptures is a lack of *desire*.

When we talk about illiteracy, we’re not necessarily talking about whether a person can read, or really whether a person has strong reading comprehension skills. The focus for this article is rooted in the problem of *knowing the Bible*. Whether it’s knowing where particular books are located, or even knowing which events happened in which books, the problem is far and wide. Instead of seeing the Bible as telling the same story, people who are “biblically illiterate” see disjointed stories that don’t tie together—they miss the entire story of redemptive history. It’s not whether someone knows the name of Nebuchadnezzar’s chief eunuch or not (it’s Ashpenaz), but rather, does this person understand why Daniel is significant in redemptive history? You might forget who Moses’ wife was (Zipporah), but did you know that Moses came *after* Abraham? These are the problems we seem to be facing.

“When a pastor has these specific aims in mind, I believe he will do well to address the problem of biblical illiteracy.”

Moreover, since the problem is both *knowledge* (mind) and *desire* (heart), the pastor now must preach in such a way as to address both issues. Is the sermon just about knowledge? Or is it just about emotions? Just how might a preacher attack the problem of biblical illiteracy?

One of the aphorisms that Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones would use to describe preaching was “logic on fire.” Preaching is logical, and it is hot. Whenever I approach a sermon, my goal is to focus on the head, the heart, and the hands. It takes the text and lights it (metaphorically) on fire. It also douses it with an accelerant as the sermon unfolds. As the Puritans would say, “The sun both melts the ice and hardens the clay.” Preaching does many things, but it must address the *whole of man*, otherwise it becomes a TED-talk, and you don’t need the Spirit to do *that*. So, preaching requires a lot

of work, as it is both an art and a science.

If the goal is focusing a sermon on the head, heart, and hands, then the vehicle to reach that goal must be hermeneutics. I have always believed and approached preaching with the presupposition that I'm not *only* saying things loudly and intensely, no, I'm doing the work of hermeneutics, while the congregation is listening. In other words, preaching isn't simply the communicating of *information*; it's the communication of *hermeneutics*. While the preacher is doing his work, he's demonstrating in his delivery (which ought to include *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*), how to do proper hermeneutics. This is the key to dealing with biblical illiteracy.

**Think about it for a second. What makes a sermon, a sermon? What makes it different than a TED talk?** What makes preaching different from attending a meeting at a hotel conference center that features a motivational speaker? What makes the sermon on the Lord's Day special? The answer is simple: preaching is a means of *grace*. Preaching is what God has set aside for Himself. It's what God desires His people to experience. The Holy Spirit of God uses preaching to shave off the rough edges and heal the wounds of the previous week. Preaching is a balm that soothes the weary sinner. God has chosen the preaching of the gospel and the teaching of His word as the very means to bring a sinner to repentance, and bring a now justified-in-Christ-sinner to maturity. *Preaching matures us.*

When a pastor has these specific aims in mind, I believe he will do well to address the problem of biblical illiteracy. The goal must always be addressing the head, heart, and hands—changing what we think, how we feel, and what we do. *God's word is a corrective.* The way to get to this goal is by doing proper exegesis and hermeneutics. Demonstrating to the congregation how to read the Bible properly is the vehicle that helps deliver the message in such a way as to address all the faculties of men. The outcome, Lord willing, is a production of mature men and women who are faithfully serving Jesus and clinging to Him through His Word. When this happens, the listener has much to learn and apply, and at the end of the day, he or she can say, "I've shown myself approved."



## Doing Investigative Theology: Asking Proper Questions of the Biblical Text

By Michael Boling



**A result of the trend towards biblical illiteracy and sound-bite approaches to theology** is that of the difficulty many have with proper interaction with the biblical text. The big nerdy term for how to interpret Scripture is called hermeneutics. Subsumed within the “big idea” if you will of the discipline of hermeneutics are a number of methodologies for doing sound biblical exegesis. One important method is something I like to call investigative theology—asking the correct questions of the biblical text. In journalism school, future news reporters are taught the basics of asking the big five questions: who, what, when, where, and why.

These questions are intended to ensure all the facts are gathered and reviewed, the important players identified, background information understood, and the reason for what is being reported upon fully grasped. Once all those questions have been asked and the information resulting from asking those questions collated, a news story takes shape and can then be shared.

We can utilize this same approach to investigative journalism to our study of Scripture. Asking the correct questions will help lead us to a proper understanding of what God is telling us in His Word. Now mind you simply asking questions and hoping the answer will magically jump off the pages of your Bible without putting in any level of effort is likely not going to happen. Doing good Bible study takes time and effort and avoiding sound-bite theology is essential. After asking each question, one may find themselves asking additional questions that will lead to related texts that provide another piece to the overall biblical mosaic.

Let's use the shortest verse in Scripture as a test case for what investigative the-

ology looks like in practice.

### **John 11:35 – “Jesus wept.”**

**Who** – The first inclination is to respond with the “who” being Jesus. After all, it is Jesus who is weeping. Part of asking “who” involves noting everyone involved or being impacted by the text. In the case of this passage, Jesus is weeping for a reason. Sometimes establishing the rest of the “who” will reveal itself over the course of asking the remainder of the series of questions. This verse is an example of such an instance.

**What** – The response to this question identifies the action taking place. What do we find Jesus doing in this verse? He is weeping. At this stage, the reason for his tears are not known; however, continuing with the rest of the questions will soon reveal the reason for Jesus’ tears. At this point, we merely identify the action taking place. In this case, as we have noted, Jesus is weeping.

**When** – This question explores the timing of the event. In the case of John 11:35, at what point in the ministry of Jesus did this even take place? Even matters such as the time of day, time of year, or any other timing markers that may be provided in the text should be identified. In our test text, there are no indications of when. This will require us then to look at the surrounding context for an answer. Jesus wept after he saw the dead body of his friend Lazarus.

“When asking why, there is the inherent need to first engage the immediate verse and after looking at all facets of what that verse provides...”

**Where** – When asking *where*, the need is to identify the location of the event. Our text does not provide a location, so, once again, we have to look at the surrounding context. If you scan up to John 11:18, it is clear that Lazarus lived in Bethany. Jesus journeyed from Jerusalem to Bethany.

**Why** – This particular question involves digging into the immediate and surrounding context in order to explore the reason Jesus wept. We have a limited understanding based on the previous questions, most notably that Lazarus had died and when Jesus saw the dead body of his friend, he then wept. If we simply stop there without asking any additional questions, we will miss some important matters found in the overall context. When asking *why*, there is the inherent need to first engage the immediate verse and after looking at all the facets of what that verse provides; to then step back to the surrounding verses for information and then to even step back to the overall chapter, book, location in the overall biblical text; and even as far back as how this verse fits into the overall flow of Scripture.

**In fact, asking why is arguably one of the most important questions one can ask of the text.** A warning though: asking why involves staying rooted in the information provided in the verse, context, chapter, book, and Scripture. Why can sometimes lead people down rabbit trails. At times, those rabbit-trail journeys are worthwhile, provided it properly informs the understanding of the text. For instance, there is much to be gleaned from even a two word verse such as John 11:35. It is a power packed passage that speaks to the humanity and divinity of Jesus. He identified with our sadness by weeping over the death of his friend, while at

the same time revealing his power of death by raising Lazarus from the grave. Asking why leads to the identification of those two important truths. Asking why helps us understand the reason Jesus delayed in coming to Bethany. Those are rabbit trails that are of value. On the other hand, if you ask the question of why and it leads you in this case to a study of the social structure of ancient Bethany, then perhaps you have gone down a rabbit trail that does not provide information germane to the immediate text you are engaging.

**Doing investigative theology is not the end all of sound Bible study and exegesis.** It will, however, enable you to identify key information about the text. That information can then serve as a solid foundation for further in-depth study. I encourage you to practice doing investigative theology with smaller passages such as John 11:35, and then move on to more complicated texts once you have the hang of working through these questions. Keep track of what you discover as many times what you discover in one text will inform and grow your understanding of other related texts. So, get out there and investigate God's Word! It is well worth the time and effort.

# Men's and Women's Devotional Bibles for Making and Growing Disciples of Christ

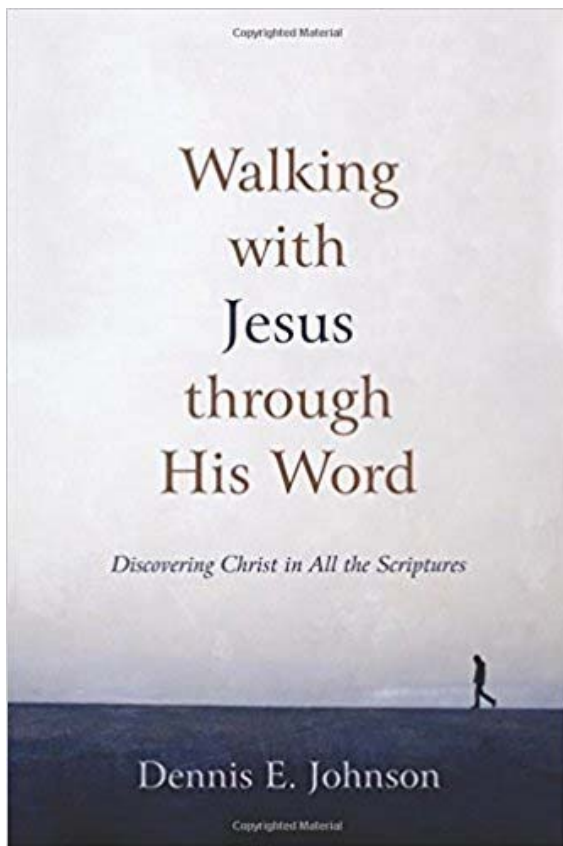
Find encouragement in the life-giving  
Word of God along with sound devotional content  
aimed at challenging hearts, enlightening minds, and  
transforming lives into the image of Christ.



## A Book Review:

### ***Walking with Jesus through His Word: Discovering Christ in All the Scriptures***

**By Dave Jenkins**



**Luke 24 is one of the most significant and important passages in the Bible as it pertains to what is known as redemptive history.**

In Luke 24, Jesus sets forth how all of Scripture is about Himself. From the front cover to the last page in the Bible, Jesus is the hero. In the past five years, we've seen a huge resurgence in books, articles, and other works written on redemptive history. Added to the growing literature on this topic is *Walking with Jesus through His Word: Discovering Christ in All the Scriptures* by Dennis E. Johnson.

One of the main criticisms about the emphasis on redemptive history is how some practitioners take a biblical passage and focus only on Jesus, without considering the passage at hand. This book addresses this concern head-on. Charles Spurgeon once said that every road in England leads to London, so every text in Scripture contains a path to Christ. We need to make sure we get on the right railways in order to move the train towards its intended destination. This is

best done by engaging in sound biblical hermeneutics, which focuses on making the point of the passage the point of the sermon. By locating the passage under consideration in the context of biblical writers theme, and in redemptive history, preachers



and Sunday school teachers can learn to faithfully handle and proclaim the message of the Bible in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In this book, Dr. Johnson shows us that there are established routes we can trust. Guiding us along the network of trails in the Old and New Testament, he points to the signs and markers that help us to identify roads to Christ. He surveys the Bible's sweeping story that makes up the lay of the land and explores different landmarks—the central motifs in Scripture that give us our bearings as we seek out Jesus. This excellent book has six parts. In part one, the author considers walking through the Bible from Luke 24, and how it sets our lives on fire. Part two considers how to read the biblical texts in their context. Part three considers *types* and their fulfillment in Scripture. Part four helps us get our “lay of the land” in three chapters, by understanding the covenant fabric of the Bible—

Jesus, the Strong and faithful Lord—and Jesus, the Submissive, Suffering Servant. Part five considers Jesus the final Prophet, our great High Priest, and Jesus, the King of Kings. One of the more helpful aspects of this book is at the end of each part, where the author helps readers understand how everything relates to the preaching and teaching of the biblical text. This makes this an excellent book, not only great in theory, but also in practice.

“This book will assist preachers engaged in pulpit ministry to faithfully preach the Word.”

This helpful book will assist preachers engaged in pulpit ministry to faithfully preach and teach the Word. This book will help Sunday school and Bible study leaders to navigate Scripture in light of its central purpose: to draw us in faith and love to our Prophet, Priest, and King Jesus Christ. *Walking with Jesus through His Word* should be required reading for every Bible college and seminary student to learn how to engage in faithful preaching and teaching of the biblical text with the goal of pointing people to Jesus. I highly recommend this very book and believe it will help enrich and deepen every Christian's daily reading of God's Word.

## Reading the Bible with Family

By Michael Boling



***“And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as front-lets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” - Deuteronomy 6:6-9***

As a parent, I am keenly reminded each and every day of the battle that wages for the hearts and minds of children. Add to that being the parent of an adopted child and you have an even greater battle taking

place. In the day-to-day routine, it seems at least in my home that we easily forget one of the fundamental keys to parenting, something God has commanded parents to be about doing at all times with their children. That key to effective par-

enting revolves around the teaching and implementation of God's word at all times and in all places.

In Deuteronomy 6:6-9, God commands parents to do a number of things. Before we examine what He commanded, it is important to take a quick step back to grasp where Israel was at when God spoke these words and what they were about to embark upon. The children of Israel were about ready to enter the Promised Land. Before they stepped foot into the land of promise, God reminded Israel of what He had done on their behalf, how He had delivered them from bondage, and moreover, He reminded them once again of the commands He had given them to live by.

Thus, the words God is referring to in Deuteronomy 6:6, are the sets of commands He gave to Israel on how they were to love Him and love others.

"God is quite clear on how He wants this instruction to take place."

These commands were not just a one-time declaration that could be heard and then forgotten or lost upon later generations. To ensure the constant focus and emphasis on these instructions, God commanded parents to constantly share these truths with their children. Fast forward to the New Testament and we find Jesus in Luke 10:27 reiterating that loving God and others finds its roots in the commands God gave in the forefront of the Book. Thus, the command to parents to instruct their children in the truth of God's Word is something we find noted throughout Scripture. It is not just a past tense requirement for the people of Israel a long time ago.

God is quite clear on how He wants this instruction to take place. First, He gives the command for parents to diligently teach these things. This phrase "teach them diligently" by no means reflects a halfhearted approach or attitude. The word translated as teach is the Hebrew verb **shaman**, which means "to inculcate anything on any one". Now for those not familiar with what inculcate means, that word connotes the concept of hammering something. Perhaps a good way to think about this activity is in relation to hammering a nail into a piece of wood. Unless you are Popeye the Sailor Man, it is highly unlikely you will be able with one smack of the hammer to drive that nail flush into the wood. It takes repetition and it requires hitting that nail exactly on the head. Furthermore, it requires hitting that nail in the same spot over and over, driving that nail into the wood. This same concept can be related to what God is commanding parents in Deuteronomy 6:7. He expects parents to drive home the word of God at all times with great zeal and purpose.

The next important point to note is God expects parents to start this instruction with their children. Do not wait until your kids are teenagers to start mentioning the Word of God. Start young and start often. Why? Proverbs 22:6 promises, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." When you plant the seeds of Scripture deep in the heart of a child when they are young, God's Word takes root in their life. While it is no guar-

antee they will follow after God when they grow to adulthood, studies have revealed “that when both parents were faithful and active in the church, 93 percent of their children remained faithful.”[1]

The next command God gives is for parents to “talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” This statement covers every element of one’s daily activities and possible locations. Now talking is far more than just a passing conversation. The word translated as talk is the Hebrew verb **dabar**, which means “to speak, declare, converse, command, promise, warn, threaten, sing” with the underlying idea of leading and guiding as a shepherd would his flocks being the primary emphasis. This means parents are to shepherd their children by using the Word of God as the shepherd’s crook, keeping them on the straight and narrow path. This takes place at home, anywhere outside the home regardless of whether you are sitting down or standing up. Basically God is saying, “Parents: at all times and in all places instruct your children in My Word.”

As if this was not clear enough, God further instructs, “You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” Binding God’s commands on your hands and your eyes signifies that the truth of His Word controls your actions and thoughts. Writing God’s Word on the doorposts of your house and on your gates reminds parents of the need for Scripture to define how their home is ran and how it functions.

“It is time parents stop abdicating their God-ordained-and-commanded responsibility to Sunday School and Youth Group leaders to train their children in the ways of God.”

How then are parents to be able to follow these clear commands of the Lord? Being able to instruct your children in the ways of God and in His Holy Word requires the parent to be faithful in their own Bible study and in prayer. It will take preparation, serious earnest preparation with God’s Word sinking into the fabric of your own heart before you can then pour out the refreshing and cleansing water of God’s Word into the lives of your children. This means that parents must hammer home God’s Word into their own lives, setting the example of what diligent Bible study looks like. This means that parents must live out in their own words and actions the truth of Scripture.

This is not easy and breaking lazy habits will not happen overnight. With that said, just as exercising your physical muscles takes diligence, practice, and know-how, so to exercising your spiritual muscles will require action, diligence, practice, and know-how so you can in turn train your children how to exercise their spiritual muscles so they can instruct their children. It is high time parents burn some spiritual fat, get a biblical chiropractic check-up and get to work following God’s clear command found in Deuteronomy 6:6-9. Swinging that biblical

hammer to drive home the truth of Scripture takes a lot of work and there is no denying that one bit. There is also no denying the benefits that will occur for those parents who are obedient to this command.

It is time parents stop abdicating their God-ordained-and-commanded responsibility to Sunday School and Youth Group leaders to train their children in the ways of God. While these other church leaders play a part, the primary responsibility rests in the laps of the parents. So, let us do as He has commanded.

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## The Need for Word Studies

By Dave Jenkins

**If someone were to ask you, “What does the word *dog* mean?”**

You might respond, “Well, use it in a sentence!”

Most words have a range of meanings, and what a word means depends on how it is used. Doing a word study is a helpful Bible study practice; however, it involves more than just looking up all



the verses where a word is used in the Bible. It involves discovering those factors that specify which meaning is being used in a given context. People sometimes make the mistake of thinking that a word has the same meaning in every instance. Consider, for example, the Jehovah’s Witnesses explanation of the meaning of *firstborn* in Colossians 1:15.

In what sense is Jesus Christ the “firstborn of all creation”? According to the customary meaning of “firstborn”, it indicates that Jesus is the eldest in Jehovah’s family of sons. Before Colossians 1:15, the expression “the firstborn of” occurs upwards of 30 times in the Bible, and, in each instance that it is applied to living creatures, the same meaning applies: the firstborn is part of the group. “The firstborn of Israel” is one of the sons of Israel; “the firstborn of Pharaoh” is one of Pharaoh’s family; “the firstborn of beast” are themselves animals.<sup>1</sup>

Doing a word study also involves considering the word in its original language.

You may not have any formal training in the biblical languages, but you can still study some things about the original biblical words. Anyone who has access to

“A good tool to help you discover this information is *The Analytical Lexicon*...”

some basic reference materials can do this. The eight steps below explain how.

**Step One:** Identify the word that you want to study and ask questions like, “Why is this word important?” “Is it a key word in the passage?” The word we will study here is *firstborn*. Jehovah’s Witnesses use this word to argue that Jesus is not God, but is part of creation—literally the first (oldest) of Jehovah’s created sons.

**Step Two:** Look up the English word in *The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance* of the Bible in order to identify the main form of the Greek word that was used originally.<sup>2</sup> *Strong’s* lists each English word used in the Bible and every verse in which it appears.<sup>3</sup> Next to each verse listed is a number. *Strong’s* assigns a number to the main form of each original word in the Bible, and many Bible reference materials use *Strong’s* numbers to help identify words. *Strong’s* number for *firstborn* in Colossians 1:15 is 4416.

Next, turn to the Greek dictionary in the back of *Strong’s* and find the entry with that number.<sup>4</sup> The numbered entry will tell you the *lexical form* of the Greek word in that verse. The lexical form is the main form of the word, the form that is found in a Greek *lexicon* (dictionary). *Strong’s* number 4416 points to the Greek word *prototokos*.

**Step Three:** Identify the *textual form* of the word. The *textual form* is how the word appears in a particular verse and may differ from the lexical form. A word may have several variations (called *inflections*) depending on how it is being used in a sentence. In English, for example, the words *talked*, *talking*, and *talker* are inflections (not to be confused with conjugations) of the word *talk*.

If you don’t know how to read Greek you can discover the textual form by using an *interlinear* New Testament, which shows the Greek text of the New Testament with an English translation below it. Find the verse and the particular English word (or phrase) you are studying, then look at the Greek word above it. Look closely at the letters in the Greek word, even if you don’t know what they are, so that you can visually identify that word in Step Four. In Colossians 1:15, above the English word *firstborn* is the Greek word *prototokos*. This is the textual form, which happens to be the same as the lexical form.

**Step Four:** Identify the *parsing information* for the textual form of the word. The *parsing information* explains how a word is functioning grammatically in a sentence, such as whether it is a noun or a verb, singular or plural.

A good tool to help you discover this information is *The Analytical Lexicon* by William D. Mounce.<sup>5</sup> This is a special dictionary that lists the parsing information for each textual form found in the New Testament. Mounce numbers the words according to a different system than *Strong’s*, but includes an appendix

that cross-references the two numbering systems. To find a word, first look in the appendix and find the *Strong's* number that you identified in Step Two. Next to *Strong's* number will be the corresponding number that Mounce uses. Turn to the lexicon section and find that number next to one of the main entry words in bold (it is the first number inside the brackets). The word in bold is the lexical form and under it is all its variations. Visually identify which one of these forms matches the textual form you found in Step Three. The textual form of our word in Colossians 1:15, again, is the same as the lexical form: *prototokos*.

Finally, look next to the form you have identified to find its parsing information. Our word *prototokos* is a nominative, singular, masculine adjective. A nominative adjective modifies a certain type of noun or pronoun. In this instance, the adjective *prototokos* is attributing a quality to the subject, which is "He" (Jesus). It is saying that He is *prototokos* (*firstborn*).

**Step Five:** Look up the word in a Greek dictionary and discover its range of meaning. The standard dictionary for the Greek New Testament is *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* by Walter Bauer.<sup>6</sup> Our word, *prototokos*, can be found in the third edition of Bauer's dictionary on page 894. Jehovah's Witnesses claim that this word can mean only that Jesus "is the eldest in Jehovah's family of sons." Bauer's dictionary, however, indicates that *prototokos* has two broad ranges of meaning: (1)literally pertaining to birth order; and (2)pertaining to having the special status associated with a firstborn, even if one is not literally the firstborn. The word, therefore, does not always have the literal meaning that the Jehovah's Witnesses insist it has.

**Step Six:** Go back to *Strong's* and locate other occurrences of the word in the Bible. Look for three things: (1) other uses by the same author in the same book; (2) other uses by the same author in his other books; (3) uses by other authors.

*Same Author, Same Book:* Paul uses *prototokos* twice in Colossians, in 1:15 and 1:18. Verse 18 could not possibly be referring to physical birth because it identifies Jesus as the firstborn "out of the dead." Paul must be using the term figuratively here to indicate having the status of the firstborn. This seems to be Paul's emphasis when he says, "so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything."

*Same Author, Different Books:* Paul uses a different form of the word (*prototokon*) in Romans 8:29. Here he refers to Jesus as "His Son", which points to the first meaning from Bauer's dictionary, literally pertaining to physical birth order; but the text is not specific enough to dictate that this *must* be the meaning. On the basis of this sentence alone, the word can be taken either way; therefore, this context is not decisive.

*Same Word, Different Authors:* Luke uses *prototokos* in Luke 2:7, where it refers to Jesus' physical birth order. This use, however, does not help the Jehovah's Witnesses argument that Jesus therefore must be a created being. First, "created being" is not one of the meanings of *prototokos* found in Bauer's dictionary, and Jehovah's Witnesses offer no evidence that the word was ever used to mean this. Second, the fact that Jesus was physically born does not necessarily mean that He was created. Christian theology explains that, although Jesus took on a human body that had a beginning, He (in His divine nature and person) is eternal. Finally, physical birth order is only one of the possible meanings, and just because Luke uses it this way does not mean Paul must be using it this way.

The word is also found in the Greek translation of Psalm 89:27, where it refers to the Davidic King whom God will exalt above all kings. In this passage, however, the term cannot mean physical birth order, because the king that God will make His firstborn is already living. The use here indicates a place of preeminence or supremacy. There are other instances of the word in the Bible, but these are sufficient to illustrate how other authors' use of the word helps us to understand its range of meaning.

**Step Seven:** Discover any relevant historical and theological information about the word using the Bible and other works. Bible dictionaries, Bible encyclopedias, and books on ancient Jewish manners and customs will provide historical information. Systematic theologies, theological dictionaries, theological wordbooks, and even commentaries will provide information about any possible theological significance of the word. Our term *firstborn* seems to have significance in ancient Jewish culture as referring to a position of greater blessing and importance among brothers, usually based on birth order, but not always; for example, Jacob and Esau (Genesis 27:1–42) and Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48:8–20).

“Understanding the Bible in its original languages involves more than just doing word studies...”

**Step Eight:** Draw conclusions and make applications. Some things we have learned from our brief word study are:

- The word *firstborn* (*prototokos*) does not always mean “first in physical birth order.” It sometimes means preeminence or superiority. Colossians 1:15 may be saying that Jesus has preeminence or superiority over all of creation.
- The meaning “first in physical birth order” does not mean that the person must be a created being. Jehovah’s Witnesses argue that the firstborn of an animal is itself an animal. Following this reasoning, then, the firstborn of God must be God!
- Colossians 1:15 does not say that Jesus is a created being (and Christ’s deity is well attested in that chapter and throughout the Bible); therefore, if Jehovah’s Witnesses believe this verse is saying that Jesus is a created being, they must already believe this, because they cannot get this meaning from the text.

Understanding the Bible in its original languages involves more than just doing word studies; but doing a word study *correctly* is a good place to start in order to unravel debates that turn upon the meaning of a single word.

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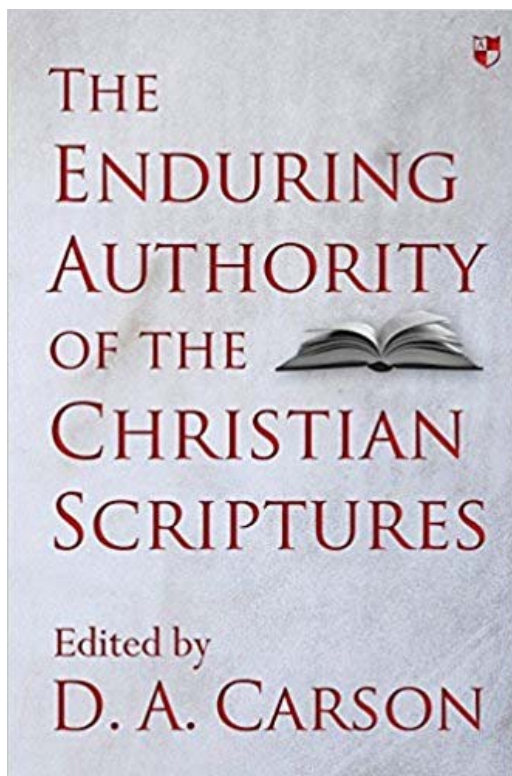
2. A number of Bible study computer programs and Web sites simplify word studies by automatically identifying much of the information and linking together many of the tools discussed in this article.
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4. These steps apply to Hebrew words as well using Hebrew language tools. *Strong's* dictionaries can be helpful for identifying words, but are not standard works for discovering definitions.
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## A Book Review:

### ***The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures***

By Michael Boling



**It is not that much of a stretch to declare the Word of God has been under attack since the Garden of Eden,** when the Serpent questioned God's command to Adam, up until the present day when Scripture continues to be questioned on seemingly all fronts. The desire for man to do what is right in our own eyes, and the temptation even from those called to declare God's Word in the capacity of preachers, teachers, and authors to question whether Scripture is completely true in all aspects, is an unfortunate reality. If we cannot depend on God's Word to be the source of truth in an age where truth is up for grabs, then we are left with quite frankly a foundation build on sand. Thus, it is absolutely vital to outline why God's Word can be trusted from the first page to the last page and everything in between. Entering into the discussion is a book released earlier this year titled, *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*. This massive tome is edited by noted biblical scholar D. A. Carson and contains contributions from a number of also notable biblical scholars, some arguably more familiar to some than others. When I say

massive, I am not speaking in hyperbole. This is a 1200+ page book that covers a wide range of important topics when it comes to matters of the authority of Scripture.

Carson sets the stage for the overall discussion by providing a thorough overview of the current discussion on biblical authority to include some interaction with relevant books on this topic that have been penned in recent years. He also provides a

helpful definition of what is meant by inerrancy, an often hotly debated topic as well. Carson concludes his introductory comments with some important epistemological, philosophical, and theological issues of importance. He properly explains, in the final paragraphs of his introduction, that “only the closest and most faithful reading of Scripture will have the temerity to construct an alternative world, a Christian world, that is deeply ground in, and permeated by, Holy Scripture.” The alternative world is in contrast to the increasingly secular world that rejects the very notion of truth as defined in Scripture.

As a point of suggestion, do not approach this book as something you can start with the first essay and then read through to the end. If you go that route, you will be overwhelmed by the sheer amount of material to wade through. This is not to say one cannot work their way through this work in that manner, but with that said, it is intended to be a collection of essays that while discussing an overarching topic, can be read individually on their own merit. In fact, I would encourage the reader to engage this book in that manner or perhaps to study each section and its respective essays.

Given the wide range of topics and the plethora of authors, the first thing I did when receiving this book is to scan the list of essays to see if anything quickly caught my eye. While I do enjoy matters of church history, an essay on Wesleyan Theology, while certainly an important piece to the overall puzzle, was not something I immediately was drawn towards. The two essays I picked up on based on their titles were written by Bruce Waltke and Kirsten Birkett, namely *Myth, History, and the Bible* and

*Science and Scripture* respectively.

“When it comes to the essay provided by Kirsten Birkett, we find a far different approach to Scripture.”

Waltke’s essay was interesting to me because I have recently read a few works by Mircea Eliade, specifically his book *The Myth of the Eternal Return*. I found Waltke’s insights and comments on Eliade’s work to be helpful, in particular, the criticism from Waltke that Eliade and the Myth and Ritual School do a bit too far in trying to holistically connect the beliefs of the early Israelites with that of

their Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) neighbors. While there are similarities in regards to history happening in a cyclical manner and the important element of a return to creation (in the case of Scripture the matter of the redemption of all things and a “return to the Garden” if you will), at times, Eliade and others take their approach a bit too far.

**I also found Waltke’s discussion of the differences and similarities between the ANE Gilgamesh Epic and the biblical account of Noah’s flood to be informative.** He notes, “The biblical flood narrative stands head and shoulders above the others in wisdom and theology, lifting the audience to heavenly heights of virtue and praise.” Thus, the account of Noah’s flood stands in contradistinction to the ANE myths of the gods fighting it out with some

interesting actions such as “breaking wind” in each other’s face. It is important to grasp the vast difference between the pagan cosmology presented in works such as the *Enuma Elish* and the biblical narrative. Waltke saliently concludes his essay by averring “Israel’s sovereign God created matter out of nothing, is transcendent in his rule over all of his creation, conflicts with cosmic and volitional evil to produce virtue and bring rightful praise to him, and created the cosmos as the first of his saving acts in a trajectory ending with his kingdom irrupting into the world through his magnolia Dei and word and an eternal state in which he finally eliminates all hostility.” So we have Waltke seemingly making a rather strong and clear declaration that Scripture, especially when it comes to matters of ancient myth, is historical and factual in its description of something such as Noah’s flood.

When it comes to the essay provided by Kirsten Birkett, we find a far different approach to Scripture. I will state I am unequivocally a proponent of approaching the creation account found in Genesis as a literal outline of how God created the heavens and the earth (i.e. all things). If we can affirm that Noah’s flood is not ancient myth and is instead a historical account of the God of the Bible interacting with the affairs of man in keeping with His divine plan, it would seem to go without saying that the account of creation found in Scripture should be approached in the same manner, namely as real history. More specifically, we should then affirm God created all things in six literal days as He so clearly declares in Genesis and elsewhere in Exodus 20 and again in Exodus 31 and referred to in passages such as Hebrews 4.

**Birkett states that at points in church history, the days of Genesis has been a debated topic.** She discusses the beliefs of writers such as Philo, Origen, and Augustine and their understanding of the days of Genesis. She then interacts with several other authors and their respective interpretations. This was an interesting and admittedly a helpful journey through history although not authoritative given Scripture is the ultimate guide for truth on matters such as this. Birkett next pivots to a clear effort to suggest that the “rise of creationism was spurred by the atheistic contention that the Bible and evolution could not both be true. Those who accepted this, repelled by evolutionist arrogance, took up creationism.” In other words, biblical creationism and its rise were nothing more than an effort to deal with evolution. Furthermore, Birkett declares, “People reacted against science to determine their view of the Bible; and those views became increasingly inflexible as the decades went on.”

I found the subheading of “The Rise of Creationism: Scripture against Science” to be misleading. For starters, it presents the idea that those who affirm biblical creationism are anti-science, something that is a falsehood. Also of concern was the idea presented that evolution can come alongside Scripture as compatible and associated ideologies. She references the writings of evolutionary biologist Denis Alexander as apparently helpful in this regard. It is somewhat strange to as holistic proof of why biblical creationists are anti-science. Interestingly, Birkett completely failed to interact with studies from young-earth creation scientists on matters of science proper or when it comes to important issues such as death and suffering or whether one affirms Genesis as literal history or merely a mythical account that is nothing but symbolism. All in all, this was a very disappointing essay and goes against the very grain of the point of this work as a whole, namely affirming and demonstrating the authority of Scripture. If the

days of creation are not literal days, then Birkett has failed to interact with why God related the work week to His creative acts if nothing else. Outside the “debate” on *yom* (Hebrew for *day*), if God did not create in six literal days, then a cursory examination of why God declared to His people to work six days and to rest on the seventh was such a big deal to our Creator. Birkett seemed more interested in finding loopholes in order to allow evolution to find a place at the table with Scripture.

**As a whole, I found this work to be enlightening and a very good read.** Outside of some essays that are to be honest not my cup of tea topic wise and the aforementioned disappointment of Birkett’s clear rejection of Genesis as representing a literal historical account of creation, I will submit this tome was worth my time. I might even take a look at those essays that I did not find that interesting at this point in my studies at a later time. Who knows, studying Wesleyan theology might have an appeal. I do recommend this study except Birkett’s essay.

## The Problem with Biblical Illiteracy and What to Do About It

By Dave Jenkins



**One of the biggest issues that isn't being talked about enough is the issue of biblical illiteracy.** Researchers George Gallup and Jim Castelli put the problem squarely: "Americans revere the Bible—but, by and large, they don't read it. And because they don't read it, they have become a nation of biblical illiterates." How bad is it? Researchers tell us

that it's worse than most could imagine.

Fewer than half of all adults can name the four Gospels. Many Christians cannot identify more than two or three of the disciples. According to data from the Barna Research Group, 60 percent of Americans can't name even five of the Ten Commandments. "No wonder people break the Ten Commandments all the time. They don't know what they are," said George Barna, President of the firm. The bottom line? "Increasingly, America is biblically illiterate."

**Multiple surveys reveal the problem in stark terms. According to 82 percent of Americans, "God helps those who help themselves," is a Bible verse.** Those identified as born-again Christians did better—by one percent. A majority of adults think the Bible teaches that the most important purpose in life is taking care of one's family.

Some of the statistics are enough to perplex even those aware of the problem. A Barna poll indicated that at least 12 percent of adults believe that Joan of Arc was Noah's wife. Another survey of graduating high school seniors revealed that over 50 percent thought that Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife. A considerable num-

ber of respondents to one poll indicated that the Sermon on the Mount was preached by Billy Graham. We are in big trouble.

Christians who lack biblical knowledge are the products of churches that marginalize biblical knowledge. Bible teaching now often accounts for only a diminishing fraction of the local congregation's time and attention. The move to small group ministry has certainly increased opportunities for fellowship, but many of these groups never get beyond superficial Bible study. Youth ministries are asked to fix problems, provide entertainment, and keep kids busy. How many local-church youth programs actually produce substantial Bible knowledge in young people? Even the pulpit has been sidelined in many congregations. Preaching has taken a back seat to other concerns in corporate worship. The centrality of biblical preaching to the formation of disciples is lost, and Christian ignorance leads to Christian indolence and worse.

This really is *our* problem, and it is up to this generation of Christians to reverse course. Recovery starts at home. Parents are to be the first and most important educators of their own children, diligently teaching them the Word of God (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). Parents cannot franchise their responsibility to the congregation, no matter how faithful and biblical it may be. God assigned parents this non-negotiable responsibility, and children must see their Christian parents as teachers and fellow students of God's Word.

### **Bible Reading**

Americans read the Bible on occasion—churchgoers a little more. In a recent [LifeWay Research](#) study, we learned the following about our Bible reading habits among church attendees. They indicated that they read their Bible as follows:

- 19% - Every day
- 26% - A few times a week
- 14% - Once a week
- 22% - At least once a month
- 18% - Rarely or never.

There are a couple of interesting takeaways from this study. Almost 60% of churchgoers open our Bibles at home during the week at least once. And for every person who is reading his/her Bible every day (19%), someone isn't... at all (18%).

### **The Ubiquity of the Bible**

The English language Bible continues to be the most popular book in our world. Every year, about 25 million Bibles are sold in the United States, with Bible publishers pulling more than a half billion dollars annually. Nine out of ten American homes have a Bible. Among those homes, the average home here in the U.S. has three Bibles. The Gideon's have passed out more than 1.9 billion Bibles. This year alone, our Bible societies will distribute more than 400 million Bibles.

Many Christians rightly believe that they need to read the Bible. Such Christians have reading plans and study the Bible themselves. Many other Christians tend to focus on reading the Word of God without application. Finally, many Christians read the Bible more like it's a book of stories than the inspired Word of God. Understanding how to hear the Word of God, read the Word of God, and study the Word of God is vital.



A recent study conducted by Lifeway Research and sponsored by Ligonier Ministries produced a study called *The State of Theology*. This report tells us a lot about contemporary evangelicals and their beliefs. On one part of this study, they asked those polled to respond to the following statement: "The Bible was written for each person to interpret as they choose." 14 percent strongly agreed, 31 agreed somewhat, 19 percent disagree somewhat, 26 percent agree strongly, and 10 percent aren't sure (15). Self-identified evangelicals who attend church once a month or more (66%) are more likely to Strongly Disagree than Other Christians (22%) and Non-Christians (15%). Evangelicals (48%) are more likely to Strongly Disagree than Black Protestants (35%), Catholics (18%), and Mainlines (18%).

The next part of the study asked responders if "the Bible alone is the written Word of God." 30 percent agreed strongly, 18 agreed somewhat, 19 percent disagree somewhat, 19 percent disagree strongly, and 12 percent aren't sure. Self-identified evangelicals who attend church once a month or more (79%) are more likely to Strongly Agree than Other Christians (27%) and Non-Christians (11%). Evangelicals (62%) are more likely to Strongly Agree than Black Protestants (46%), Catholics (17%), and Mainlines (22%).

The next part of the study considered the following statement, "The Bible is 100% accurate in all that it teaches." 27 percent agreed strongly with this statement, 16 agreed somewhat, 21 percent disagreed somewhat, 25 percent disagree strongly, and 12 percent aren't sure (16). Self-identified evangelicals who attend church once a month or more (78%) are more likely to Strongly Agree than Other Christians (23%) and Non-Christians (9%). Evangelicals (61%) are more likely to Strongly Agree than Black Protestants (43%), Catholics (12%), and Mainlines (17%).

### **Hearing God's Word**

We could argue that the easiest of the spiritual disciplines is hearing the Word of God as it is preached. We must develop the regular practice of attending a local church where God's Word is faithfully preached. In Luke 11:28, Jesus says, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" So merely listening to God-inspired words is not the point. Hearing the Word should lead to obedience to what God says, which leads to Christ-likeness.

Or consider the words of Paul in Romans 10:17, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." While this verse is teaching about initial faith, we need this kind of faith day to day. For example, hearing about God's provision may aid a family to trust God in the families' difficult financial situation. Or hearing a biblically based sermon on the love of Christ may be God's means of granting assurance to a downcast believer. So listen to the Word in church. Download podcasts. Listen to sermons. Today, you can even take sermons with you through your smartphone, laptop, mp3 player, etc.

### **Reading God's Word**

Matthew 4:4, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." Jesus desires His followers to read "every word" that comes from the mouth of God. 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that all Scripture is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness," so let us feast upon those words! In these spiritual disciplines of hearing and reading the Bible we

encounter the transforming grace of God. The most critical discipline is one's intake of Scripture.

Discipline yourself to find the time to hear and read the Word of God. Make a habit of getting up early if you must. Second, find a good Bible reading plan. Many Christians just open up their Bible and play Russian roulette with the Word of God. But if you do this, you lose the Scriptural context and miss out on some key passages. Many study Bibles contain a reading schedule somewhere in the front or back. Most local churches can provide you with a daily reading schedule also. Keep a record of which books of the Bible you've read. Put a check beside a chapter when you read it or the title of that book in the table of contents when you've completed. Regardless of how long it takes or in what order they are read, you'll know when you've completed reading the Bible.

### **Studying God's Word**

Ezra 7:10 says, *"For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel."* There's an instructive significance to the sequence in this verse. Ezra (1) "devoted himself", (2) "to the study", (3) "and observant of the Law of the Lord", and (4) "and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel". Before he taught the Word of God to the people of God, he practiced what he learned. Ezra's learning came from the Scriptures. Before he studied he first devoted himself to study. Ezra is an example of disciplining himself to study God's Word.

The other example comes from Acts 17:11. Missionaries Paul and Silas have barely escaped from Thessalonica after their successful evangelistic work had provoked the Jews there to jealousy. When they repeated the same course of action in Berea, the Jews there responded differently: "Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with greater eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." The willingness to examine the Scripture is commended as noble character here.

Why do so many Christians neglect the study of God's Word? Dr. R.C. Sproul said: "Here then, is the real problem of our negligence. We fail in our duty to study God's Word not so much because it is difficult to understand, not so much because it is dull and boring but because its work. Our problem is not a lack of intelligence or a lack of passion. Our problem is that we are lazy."[\[2\]](#)

For some the problem may be about how to study or how to begin to study. The basic difference between Bible reading and Bible study is as simple as a pencil and a piece of paper (one can even use a laptop and Word to write down observations). Write down your observations about the text as you read and record questions that come to your mind. If your Bible has cross-references, look up the one's that relate to the verses that prompt your questions, then record your insights. Find a key word in your reading and use the concordance found in the back of most Bibles to review the other references that use the word, and again note your findings. Another way to begin is to outline a chapter, one paragraph at a time. When you read that chapter, move on to the next until you've outlined the rest of the book. Before long you'll have a far stronger grasp on a section of Scripture than you had by just reading it.

As you advance in the study of the Bible you will learn the value of in-depth word studies, character studies, topical studies, and book studies. You'll discover a new richness in the Scripture as your understanding grows of how the grammar, history, culture, and geography surrounding a text affects its interpretation.

Don't let a feeling of inadequacy keep you from the delight of learning the Bible on your own. Books, thick and thin, abound on how to study the Bible. They can provide more guidance regarding methods and tools that we can delve into in this blog post. Don't settle only for spiritual food that has been "predigested" by others. Experience the joy of discovering biblical insights firsthand through your own Bible study.

If one could measure the quality of growth in godliness by the quality of one's Bible intake what would be the result?

One's growth in godliness is greatly affected by your Bible intake. Jesus in John 17:17 said this, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." God's plan for sanctifying us, that is, for making us holy and godly, is accomplished by means of "the truth"—His Word. If we settle for a poor quality of intake of hearing, reading and studying God's Word we restrict the main flow of God's sanctifying grace to us.

"Besides launching out individually, join a Bible study group in your local church or community, or even consider starting a group study."

What is one thing I can do to improve my intake of God's Word? Joining a group of like-minded believers to hear God's Word preached each week should be a minimum. Many Bible-believing churches provide more than one opportunity each week to hear God's Word. You may want to consider podcasts (we have regular [sermons](#) posted here on Servants of Grace), or Bible exposition on radio as options for increased hearing of God's Word. Also inexpensive workbooks and study guides on every book in the Bible and a multitude of topics are available in Christian bookstores. Besides launching out individually, join a Bible study group in your local church or community, or even consider starting a group study.

Whatever way you choose, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness by committing to at least one way of improving your intake of God's Word. Those who use their Bibles little are really not much better off than those who have no Bible at all.

### **Memorizing God's Word**

Many Christians look on the spiritual discipline of memorizing God's Word as something tantamount to modern day martyrdom. Memorizing Scripture is precious when viewed with the understanding of one depositing God's Word within one's mind. When Scripture is stored in the mind, it is available for the Holy Spirit to take and bring to one's attention when they need it the most. Psalm 119:11, "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." When the Holy Spirit brings a verse to mind in a specific situation it's an illustration of Ephesians 6:17, "the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God." A pertinent scriptural truth, brought to one's awareness by the Holy Spirit at just the right moment can be the weapon that makes the difference in a spiritual battle. One of the ways one experiences more spiritual vic-

tories is to do as Jesus did—memorize Scripture so that it's available for the Holy Spirit to take and ignite within one when it is needed the most.

Every Christian ought to want to grow in their faith. One way to do this is to strength oneself to memorize Scripture. Proverbs 22:17-19 encourages, "Incline your ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply your heart to my knowledge, for it will be pleasant if you keep them within you, if all of them are ready on your lips. That your trust may be in the LORD, I have made them known to you today, even to you." To "apply your heart to my knowledge, for it will be pleasant if you keep them within you" pertains to Scriptural memory. The reason given here for keeping the wise words of Scripture within you and ready on your lips is so that your trust may be in the Lord. Memorizing Scripture strengths your faith because it repeatedly reinforces the truth, often just when one needs to hear it again.

"The kind of meditation encouraged in Scripture differs from other kinds of meditation in several ways."

On the Day of Pentecost the Apostle Peter was suddenly inspired by God to stand and preach to the crowd about Jesus. Much of what he said consisted of quotations from the Old Testament (Acts 2:14-40). There's a qualitative difference between Peter's uniquely inspired sermon and our Spirit-led conversations but his experience illustrates how Scripture memory can prepare one for unexpected witnessing or counseling opportunities that come one's way.

Psalm 119:24 extols, "Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors." The Holy Spirit will use whatever scriptural truth one has in one's memory bank for the use of ministry and also to provide timely guidance to ourselves.

### **Memorization Fuels Meditation**

One of the most underrated benefits of memorizing Scripture is that it provides fuel for meditation. When one memorizes a verse of Scripture one can meditate on it at any time during the day or night. Psalm 119:97 provides a great example of this, "Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day." The Word of God is the Sword of the Spirit, but the Holy Spirit cannot give you a weapon you have not stored in the armory of one's mind.

The main issue with memorizing Scripture is not a lack of memory, but a lack of motivation. If you know your birthday, phone number and address and can remember the names of family, friends, then you can memorize Scripture. The question becomes whether you are willing to discipline yourself to do it.

Having a plan for Scripture memory is crucial. There are several good pre-packaged Scripture memory plans available in Christian bookstores. Memorizing Scripture on a topic of interest is helpful. Also, one can make a list of the verses on a sheet of paper or write each verse on a separate index card. When memorizing Scripture do not lower your standard of getting a few words right. Make sure you are memorizing every word and can recite it word for word. Memorize it word for word and learn the reference, too. Without an objective standard of measurement, the goal

is unclear and one may tend to continue lowering the standard until one quits entirely. Make sure you also find an accountability partner to help you in your quest to scriptural memory.

### **Meditating on God's Word: Benefits and Methods**

Meditation in today's culture is most identified as non-Christian systems of thought than with Biblical Christianity. Even among Christians, the practice of meditation is often closely associated with yoga, transcendental meditation, relaxation therapy, or the New Age Movement. As a result of this many Christians are uncomfortable with the whole topic of meditation and suspicious of those who engage in it. Christians must remember that meditation is commanded by God and modeled by the godly in Scripture.

The kind of meditation encouraged in Scripture differs from other kinds of meditation in several ways. While some advocate a kind of meditation in which one empties their mind, Christian meditation involves filling your mind with God and truth. For some, meditation is an attempt to achieve complete mental passivity, but biblical meditation requires constructive mental activity. Worldly meditation employs visualization techniques intended to create one's reality. Christian history has always had a place for the sanctified use of one's God-given imagination in meditation, imagination is one's servant to help one meditate on things that are true (Philippians 4:8). Instead of attempting to create one's reality through visualization Christians link meditation with prayer to God and responsible, Spirit-filled human action to effect changes.

Meditation is the deep thinking on truths and scriptural realities as revealed in Scripture for the purposes of understanding, application and prayer. Meditation goes beyond hearing, reading, studying and even memorizing as a means of taking in God's Word.

### **Joshua 1:8 and the Promise of Success**

There is a Scriptural connection between success and the practice of meditation found in Joshua 1:8. As the Lord was commissioning Joshua to succeed Moses as the leader of His people He told him, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success."

The prosperity and success the Lord speaks here is prosperity and success from God's perspective not the world's. From a New Testament perspective we know that the main application of this promise would be to the prosperity of the soul and spiritual success. True success is promised to those who meditate on God's Word, who think deeply on Scripture not only as one time each day, but at moments throughout the day and night. They meditate so much that Scripture saturates their conversation. The fruit of their meditation is in action. They do what they find written in God's Word and as a result God prospers their way and grants them success.

Psalms 39:3 says, "My heart became hot within me. As I mused, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue." The Hebrew word translated meditated here is related to the one rendered meditate in Joshua 1:8. When we hear, read, study or memorize, the fire of God's Word, the addition of meditation becomes like a bellows upon what we've taken in. As the fire blazes more brightly, it gives off more light (insight and

understanding) and heat (passion for obedient action). As a result of this one will be prosperous and successful. Why does the intake of God's Word often leave one cold and why don't we have more success in our spiritual life? Thomas Watson has the answer, "The reason we come away so cold from reading the Word is, because we do not warm ourselves at the fire of meditation."

### **Psalm 1:1-3- The Promises**

God's promises in Psalm 1:1-3 regarding meditation are every bit as generous as Psalm 1:1-3, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers."

We think about what we delight in. The tree of your spiritual life thrives best with meditation because it helps you absorb the water of God's Word (Ephesians 5:26). Merely hearing or reading God's Word can be like a short rainfall on hard ground. Regardless of the amount or intensity of the rain most runs off and little sinks in. Meditation opens the soil of the soul and lets the water of God's Word percolate in deeply. The result is extraordinary fruitfulness and spiritual prosperity.

The author of Psalm 119 was confident that he was wiser than all his enemies (Psalm 119:98). Moreover he said, "I have more insight than all my teachers" (verse 99). Is it because he heard or studied or memorized God's Word more than every one of his enemies and his teacher? Probably not! The Psalmist was wiser; not necessarily because of more input, but because of more insight. Psalm 119:98-99 gives the answer to this issue, "Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation."

It is possible to encounter a torrential amount of God's Truth but without absorption one will be little better for the experience. Medication is the absorption. Meditation is important for spiritual fruitfulness and prosperity. Even if the total input of God's Word were the same as it was in prior centuries, we today have experienced a flash flood of information that the Psalmist could never have imagined. Combine this with some of the modern responsibilities and the result is a mental distraction and dissipation that choke one's absorption of Scripture.

Select an appropriate passage

The easiest way to decide what to meditate on is to choose the verses, phrase or word that impressed one the most during the reading of Scripture. Meditation is essentially a subjective activity a fact that underscores the importance of basing it on Scripture the perfectly objective resource. One's understanding of the ministry of the Holy Spirit also leads one to believe that many times He, as Author of the book, will impress one with a certain part of Scripture because that is the very part He wants one to meditate on for that day. This approach can be misused or taken to an extreme. We must use wisdom to make sure we don't fail to meditate on the Person and work of Jesus and the great themes of the Bible.



Verses that relate to one's concerns and personal needs are ones that you should use for meditation. We should not approach the Bible as simply a digest of wise advice, a collection of promises or an "answer book", it is God's will that we give our attention to those things He has written that directly pertain to one's circumstances. If you've been struggling with your thought life, read Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."

One of the most consistent ways to select a passage for meditation is to discern the main message of the selection of your encounter with Scripture and meditate on its meaning and application. After one does this one should repeat the verse or phrase of Scripture by mulling it over. The point here is not to repeat vainly each word of the verse until they've been emphasized. The purpose is to think deeply upon the light (Truth) that flashes into your mind each time the verse is turned. After one does this look for application. Ask yourself, "How am I to respond to this text?" The outcome of meditation should be application. Like chewing without swallowing, so meditation is incomplete without some type of application.

"Pray through God's Word."

Pray through God's Word. Psalm 119:18 begs, "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your life." The Holy Spirit guides one into all truth (John 14:26). Meditation is more than just riveted human concentration or creative mental energy. Praying your way through a verse of Scripture submits the mind of the Holy Spirit's illumination for the text and intensifies your spiritual perception. The Bible was written under the Holy Spirit's inspiration, so pray for His illumination in your meditation. Meditation always involves two people—the Christian and the Holy Spirit. Praying over a text is the invitation for the Holy Spirit to hold His divine light over the words of Scripture to show you what you cannot see without Him.

When meditating on Scripture take your time. Read less if necessary. Although many Christians need to find the time to increase their Bible reading, there may be some who are spending all the time they can or should be reading the Bible. If you could not possibly add more time to your devotional schedule for meditating on Scripture reading, read less in order to have some unhurried time for meditation. Even though you may find moments throughout the day when you can meditate on God's Word (Psalm 119:97), the best meditation generally occurs when it's part of one's main daily encounter with the Bible.

### **Applying God's Word- Benefits and Methods**

The Bible promises the blessing of God on those who apply the Word of God to one's daily life. The classic New Covenant statement on the value of integrating the spiritual with the concrete is James 1:22-25: "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he

is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.” Pithy and powerful is Jesus’ similar statement in John 13:17, “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”

These verses teach that there can be a delusion in hearing God’s Word. Without minimizing the sufficiency of Scripture nor the power of the Holy Spirit to work through even the most casual brush with the Bible, we can frequently be deluded about Scripture’s impact on our lives. According to James, we can experience God’s truth so powerfully that what the Lord wants us to do becomes as plain as our face in the morning mirror. If we do not apply the truth as we meet it, we delude ourselves by thinking we have gained practical value, regardless of how wonderful the experience of discovering the truth has been. The one who will be blessed in what he does is the one who does what Scripture says.

For someone to be blessed in what he does is the equivalent of the promises of blessing, success and prosperity given in Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1:1-3 to those who meditate on God’s Word. That’s because meditation should ultimately lead to application. When God instructed Joshua to meditate on His word day and night, He told him the purpose for meditating was “so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.” The promise “then you will be prosperous and successful” would be fulfilled, not as the result of meditation only, but as God’s blessing upon meditation-forged application.

The Lord wants you to be a doer of the Word. One should open the Bible with expectancy and anticipate the discovery of a practical response to the truth of God. It makes a big difference to come to the Bible with the faith that you will find an application for it as opposed to believing you won’t. Thomas Watson was called the nursing mother of the gigantic evangelical divines, and encouraged anticipation about application when he

“Asking questions is one of the ways to meditate.”

said, “Take every word as spoken to yourselves. When the word thunders against sin, think thus: “God means my sins” when it presents any duty, “God intends me in this.”” Many put off Scripture from themselves, as if it only concerned those who lived in the time when it was written but if you intend to profit by the Word bring it home to yourselves, since medicine will do no good, unless it be applied.

Because of God’s inspiration of Scripture, believe that what you are reading was meant for you as well as for the first recipient of the message. Without that attitude you’ll rarely perceive the application of the passage of Scripture to your personal situation. Meditation is not an end in itself. Deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities of Scripture is the key to putting them into practice. It is by means of meditating on the Bible that facts are fleshed out into practical application.

If one reads, hears, or studies God's Word without meditating on it, no wonder "applying Scripture to concrete situations" is difficult. Perhaps we could even train a parrot to memorize every verse of Scripture that we do, but if we don't apply those verses to life, they won't be of much lasting value to us or the parrot. How does the Word memorized become the Word applied? It happens through meditation.

Most information, even biblical information, flows through our minds like water through a sieve. There's usually so much information come in each day and it comes in so quickly that we retain very little. When we meditate the truth remains and percolates. We can smell its aroma more fully and taste it better. As it brews in our brain the insights come. The heart is heated by meditation and cold truth is melted into passionate action.

Psalm 119:15 states, "I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways." It was through meditation on God's Word that the psalmist discerned how to regard God's ways for living, that is, how to be a doer of them. The way to determine how any Scripture applies to the concrete situations of life is to meditate on that Scripture.

Asking questions is one of the ways to meditate. The more questions you ask and answer about a verse of Scripture the more you will understand it and the more clearly you will see how it applies. Here are some examples of this: Does this text reveal something I should believe about God? Does this text reveal something I should praise or thank or trust God for? Does this text reveal something I should pray about for myself or others? Does this text reveal something I should have a new attitude about? Does this text reveal something I should make a decision about? Does this text reveal something I should do for the sake of Christ, others, or myself? There are times when a verse of Scripture will have such evident application for your life that it will virtually jump off the page and plead with you to do what it says. More often than not, however, you must interview the verse, patiently asking questions of it until a down-to-earth response becomes clear.

Respond specifically to Scripture. An encounter with God through His Word should result in at least one specific response. After you have concluded your time of Bible intake you should be able to name at least one definite response you have made or will make to what you have encountered. That response may be an explicit act of faith, worship, praise, thanksgiving or prayer. It may take the form of asking someone's forgiveness or speaking a word of encouragement. The response may involve the forsaking of sin or showing an act of love. Regardless of the nature of that response, consciously commit yourself to at least one action to take following the intake of God's Word.

### **A Final Thought**

Will you begin a plan of memorizing God's Word? If you've been a Christian very long, you've probably memorized more Scripture than you realize. Will you cultivate the discipline of meditating on God's Word? Occasional Godward thoughts are not meditation. William Bridge said, "A man may think on God every day and meditate on God, no day." God calls His people throughout the Scriptures to develop the practice of dwelling on Him in our thoughts. When you consider what the Scriptures say about meditation and when you weight the testimonies of some of the most godly men and

women of Church history, the importance and value of Christian meditation for progress in Christian growth is undeniable.

Will you prove yourself an applier of the Word? You have read many verses from the Word of God in this series on reading and studying the Bible. What will you do in response to these passages of Scripture? The discipline of Bible intake, especially the discipline of applying God's Word will often be difficult. The great difficulty in applying the Bible is the opposition to it. Dr. J.I. Packer said this:

***“If I were the devil, one of my first aims would be to stop folk from digging into the Bible. Knowing that it is the Word of God, teaching men to know and love and serve the God of the Word, I should do all I could to surround it with the spiritual equivalent of pits, thorn hedges and man traps, to frighten people off. At all costs I should want to keep them from using their minds in a disciplined way to get the measure of its message.”***

Now that you have learned to read and study the Bible, are you now willing at all costs, to use your mind in a disciplined way to feed on the Word of God for the purpose of godliness? If your answer to that question is yes, then you are ready to grow in the knowledge of the Word of God and the Gospel of God since, "Nobody ever outgrows scripture; the Book widens and deepens with our years."

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## How to Lead a Small Group Bible Study

By Dave Jenkins



**What a privilege it is to lead a Bible study!** And what joy and excitement await you as you delve into the Word of God and help others to discover its life-changing truths. If God has called you to lead a Bible study group, I know you'll be spending much time in prayer and planning and giving much thought to being an effective leader. I also know that taking the time to read through the following tips will help you to navigate the challenges of leading a Bible study discussion group and en-

joying the effort and opportunity.

### **The Leader's Roles**

As a Bible study group leader, you'll find your role changing back and forth from expert to referee (and everything in-between) during the course of a session. Since you're the leader, group members will look to you to be the expert guiding them through the material. So be well prepared! In fact, be over-prepared so that you know the material better than any group member does. Start your study early in the week and let its message simmer all week long. (You might even work several lessons ahead so that you have in mind the big picture and the overall direction of the study.) Be ready to share some additional gems that your group members wouldn't have discovered on their own. That extra insight from your study time—or that comment from a wise Bible teacher or scholar, that clever saying, that keen observation from another believer, and even an appropriate joke—adds an element of fun and keeps Bible study from becoming routine, monotonous, and dry.

**Next, be ready to be the group's cheerleader.** Your energy and enthusiasm for the task at hand can be contagious. It can also stimulate people to get more involved in their personal study as well as in the group discussion.

Third, be the one who shows a genuine concern for the members of the group. You're the one who will establish the atmosphere of the group. If you laugh and have fun, the group members will laugh and have fun. If you hug, they will hug. If you care, they will care. If you share, they will share. So pray every day to love the men and women God has placed in your group. Ask Him to show you how to love them with His love.

Finally, as the leader, you'll need to be the referee on occasion. That means making sure everyone has an equal opportunity to speak. That's easier to do when you operate under the assumption that every member of the group has something worthwhile to contribute. So, trusting that the Lord has taught each person during the week, act on that assumption. These roles of the leader may make the task seem overwhelming. But that's not bad if it keeps you on your knees praying for your group.

### **A Good Start**

Beginning on time, greeting people warmly, and opening in prayer gets the study off to a good start. Know what you want to have happen during your time together and make sure those things get done as much as possible. That kind of order means comfort for those involved. Establish a format and let the group members know what that format is. People appreciate being in a Bible study that focuses on the Bible. So keep the discussion on the topic and move the group through the questions. Tangents are often hard to avoid—and even harder to rein in—so be sure to focus on the answers to questions about the specific passage at hand. After all, the purpose of the group is Bible study!

Finally, as someone has accurately observed, "Personal growth is one of the by-products of any effective small group. This growth is achieved when people are recognized and accepted by others. The more friendliness, mutual trust, respect, and warmth exhibited, the more likely that the member will find pleasure in the group, and, too, the more likely she will work hard toward the accomplishment of the group's goals. The effective leader will strive to reinforce desirable traits" (source unknown).



### A Dozen Helpful Tips

Here is a list of helpful suggestions for leading a Bible study discussion group:

1. Arrive *early*, ready to focus fully on others and give of yourself. If you have to do any last-minute preparation—review, re-grouping, or praying—do it in the car. Don't dash in, breathless, harried, late, or still tweaking your plans.
2. Check out your meeting place in advance. Do you have everything you need—tables, enough chairs, a black board, hymnals if you plan to sing, coffee, etc.?
3. Greet each person warmly by name as they arrive. After all, you've been praying for these men and women all week long, so let each one know that you're glad they've arrived.
4. Use name tags for at least the first two or three weeks.
5. Start on time no matter what, even if only one person is there (unless there are extenuating circumstances)!
6. Develop a pleasant but firm opening statement. You might say, "I absolutely loved reviewing this passage! Let's get started so we can enjoy all of it!" or "Let's pray before we begin our lesson."
7. Read the questions, but don't hesitate to reword them on occasion. Rather than reading an entire paragraph of instructions, for instance, you might say, "Question 1 asks us to list some ways that Christ displayed humility. Pick a group member and ask them to please share one way Christ displayed humility."
8. Summarize or paraphrase the answers given. Doing so will keep the discussion focused on the topic, eliminate digressions, help avoid or clear up any misunderstandings of the biblical text, and keep each group member aware of what the others are saying.
9. Keep moving and don't add any of your own questions to the discussion time. It's important to get through the study guide questions. So if a cut-and-dried answer is called for, you don't need to comment with anything other than a "thank you." But when the question asks for an opinion or an application (for instance, "How can this truth help us in our marriages?" or "How do you find time for your quiet time?"), let all who want to contribute do so.
10. Affirm each person who contributes, especially if the contribution was very personal, painful to share, or a quiet person's rare statement. Make everyone who shares a hero by saying something like "Thank you for sharing that insight from your own life," or "We certainly appreciate what God has taught you. Thank you for letting us in on it."
11. Watch your watch, put a clock right in front of you, or consider using a timer. Pace the discussion so that you meet your cut-off time, especially if you want time to pray. Stop at the designated time even if you haven't finished the lesson. Remember that everyone has worked through the study once; you are simply going over it again.
12. End *on time*. You can only make friends with your group members by ending on time or even a little early! Besides, members of your group have the next item on their agenda to attend to—picking up children from the nursery, babysitter, or school; heading home to tend to matters there; running errands; getting to bed; or

spending some time with their husbands. So let them out on time!

### Five Common Problems during Bible-Study

In any group, you can anticipate certain problems. Here are some common ones that can arise, along with helpful solutions:

1. **The incomplete lesson**—Right from the start, establish the policy that if someone has not done the lesson, it is best for them not to answer the questions. But do try to include their responses to questions that ask for opinions or experiences. Everyone can share some thoughts in reply to a question like, "Reflect on what you know about both athletic and spiritual training and then share what you consider to be the essential elements of training oneself in godliness." ...give all your group members the right to pass."
2. **The gossip**—The Bible clearly states that gossiping is wrong, so you don't want to allow it in your group. Set a high and strict standard by saying, "I am not comfortable with this conversation," or "We [not you] are gossiping. Let's move on." pass."
3. **The talkative member**—Here are three scenarios and some possible solutions for each.
  - The problem talker may be talking because they have done their homework and are excited about something they have to share. They may also know more about the subject than the others and, if you cut them off, the rest of the group may suffer.
    - ◊ SOLUTION: Respond with a comment like: "Dave (use group members name), you are making very valuable contributions. Let's see if we can get some reactions from the others," or "I know Joe (insert group members name) can answer this. He's really done his homework. How about some of the rest of you?"
  - The talkative member may be talking because they has not done his/her homework and wants to contribute, but has no boundaries.
    - ◊ SOLUTION: Establish at the first meeting that those who have not done the lesson do not contribute except on opinion or application questions. You may need to repeat this guideline at the beginning of each session.
  - The talkative member may want to be heard whether or not they have anything worthwhile to contribute.
    - ◊ SOLUTION: After subtle reminders, be more direct, saying, "Dave (insert group members name), I know you would like to share your ideas, but let's give others a chance. I'll call on you later."
4. **The quiet member**—Here are two scenarios and possible solutions.

- The quiet member wants the floor but somehow can't get the chance to share.
    - ◊ SOLUTION: Clear the path for the quiet member by first watching for clues that they want to speak (moving to the edge of their seat, looking as if they want to speak, perhaps even starting to say something) and then saying, "Just a second. I think Chris (insert group member's name) wants to say something." Then, of course, make them a hero!
  - The quiet member simply doesn't want the floor.
    - ◊ SOLUTION: "Chris, what answer do you have on question 2?" or "Chris, what do you think about...?" Usually after a shy person has contributed a few times, they will become more confident and more ready to share. Your role is to provide an opportunity where there is no risk of a wrong answer. But occasionally a group member will tell you that they would rather not be called on. Honor their request, but from time to time ask them privately if they feel ready to contribute to the group discussions.
  - In fact, give all your group members the right to pass. During your first meeting, explain that any time a group member does not care to share an answer, they may simply say, "I pass." You'll want to repeat this policy at the beginning of every group session.
5. **The wrong answer**—Never tell a group member that they have given a wrong answer, but at the same time never let a wrong answer go by.
- Sometimes people will unknowingly provide an incorrect or incomplete answer to a question you've posed. When this happens, a response is required.
    - ◊ SOLUTION: Either ask if someone else has a different answer or ask additional questions that will cause the right answer to emerge. As the members get closer to the right answer, say, "We're getting warmer! Keep thinking! We're almost there!"

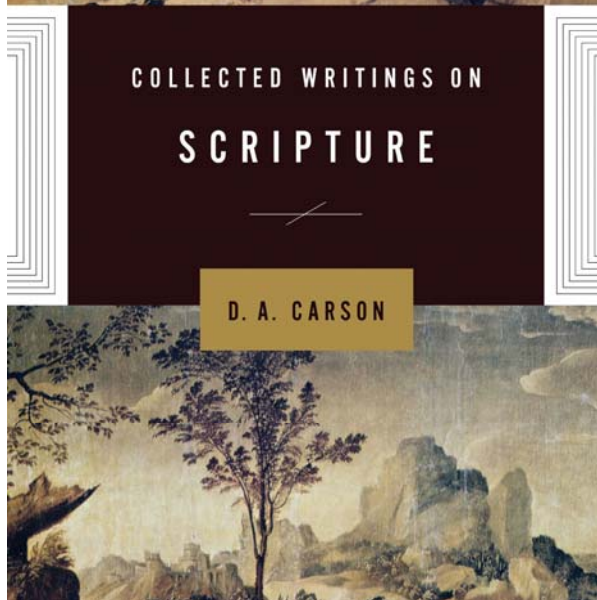
### **Learning from Experience**

Immediately after each Bible study session, evaluate the group discussion time using this checklist. You may also want a member of your group (or an assistant, trainee, or outside observer) to evaluate you periodically. May God strengthen and encourage you as you assist others in the discovery of His many wonderful truths.

## A Book Review:

### *Collected Writings on Scripture*

By Michael Boling



**Ever since the time of Adam and Eve, the Word of God has been under attack.** These

attacks not only come from outside the walls of the church, they also seem to creep into and rear their ugly head from inside the Church as well. Thus, it is vital for believers to make a concerted effort to stand on the doctrine of the authority and inspiration of Scripture as being the Word of God, provided to His people. Noted author and theologian, D. A. Carson, in his excellent book, *Collected Writings on Scripture*, provides a solid array of essays and book reviews that will help the reader grasp the importance of asserting the authority of Scripture, as well as understanding how to identify when attacks are being levied at this important foundation of the faith.

This book is divided into two sections with part one containing five essays by Carson on matters related to Scripture, specifically what the Bible is and how to interpret it, developments in the doctrine of Scripture, issues related to doing system-

atic theology, understanding redaction criticism, and finally an interaction with the doctrine of *Claritas Scripturae*. Part two of this book contains a series of critical

book reviews geared towards providing the reader with insight into the good, the bad, and, quite frankly, the ugly of past and recent works on the doctrine of Scripture.

I personally believe Dr. Carson to be one of the foremost theological minds of our day and his perspicuity regarding matters related to the doctrine of Scripture shines through on every page of this book. While it is difficult in a book as excellent as this one to select favorite selections, I will submit I was drawn specifically to two elements of Carson's work—namely his discussion on what the Bible is and how to interpret it. It seems these two aspects of the Doctrine of Scripture trip far too many up and thus I was pleased to see Carson tackle these two issues right from the beginning, using these as the foundational springboard from which he engages more difficult topics.

Carson notes, regarding the discipline of biblical theology, that it “forms an organic whole. This means not only that one can approach any part of the subject by beginning at any other point of the subject (though some vantage points are certainly more helpful than others), but that to treat some element of biblical theology as if it existed in splendid isolation seriously distorts the whole picture.” Such a statement drives home the reality that Scripture tells a consistent and cogent message, one that must be grasped in the whole rather than separating its content into tiny, unrelated points of doctrine.

**Most importantly, Scripture reveals God: who He is, how He operates, and how we can come to know Him.** I appreciated how Carson noted that when God speaks, things happen, something clearly noted in the creation account of Genesis 1. Additionally, given Scripture is the Word of God, it speaks to our hearts through the Holy Spirit. It is not a collection of words on a page. In the canon of Scripture, we see real people engaging in real events, with God revealing Himself to humanity. Carson recognizes that there are difficult passages in Scripture that require fervent study. With that said, he comments that God “has ensured that his own self-disclosure should be abundantly clear to those who by grace have eyes to see and ears to hear.”

Carson also provides the reader with a helpful primer on hermeneutics. Since we are charged by God to be a people who rightly handle the Word of truth, it is vital to understand how to properly interpret Scripture. Carson walks the reader through some foundational concepts regarding hermeneutics to include the importance of engaging the original languages with a needed discussion on the need for and the pitfalls that come from doing word studies. He also notes the importance of being a good reader, specifically taking the time to notice nuances of the text such as chiasms or other linguistic structures that impact how the text should be understood. I also found helpful Carson's discussion on the value of understanding historical and cultural context. The Bible was not

“Carson walks the reader through some foundational concepts regarding hermeneutics...”

written in a 21st century world so it is vital to pay attention to matters of geography, cultural understandings, and historical figures as they relate to Scripture. Furthermore, determining overarching patterns, principles, and themes helps the reader of Scripture grasp the overall Biblical message and Carson points out that "it is important to observe the Bible's use of such themes, to determine their specific functions, and to resolve to follow such biblical patterns in our own theological reflection."

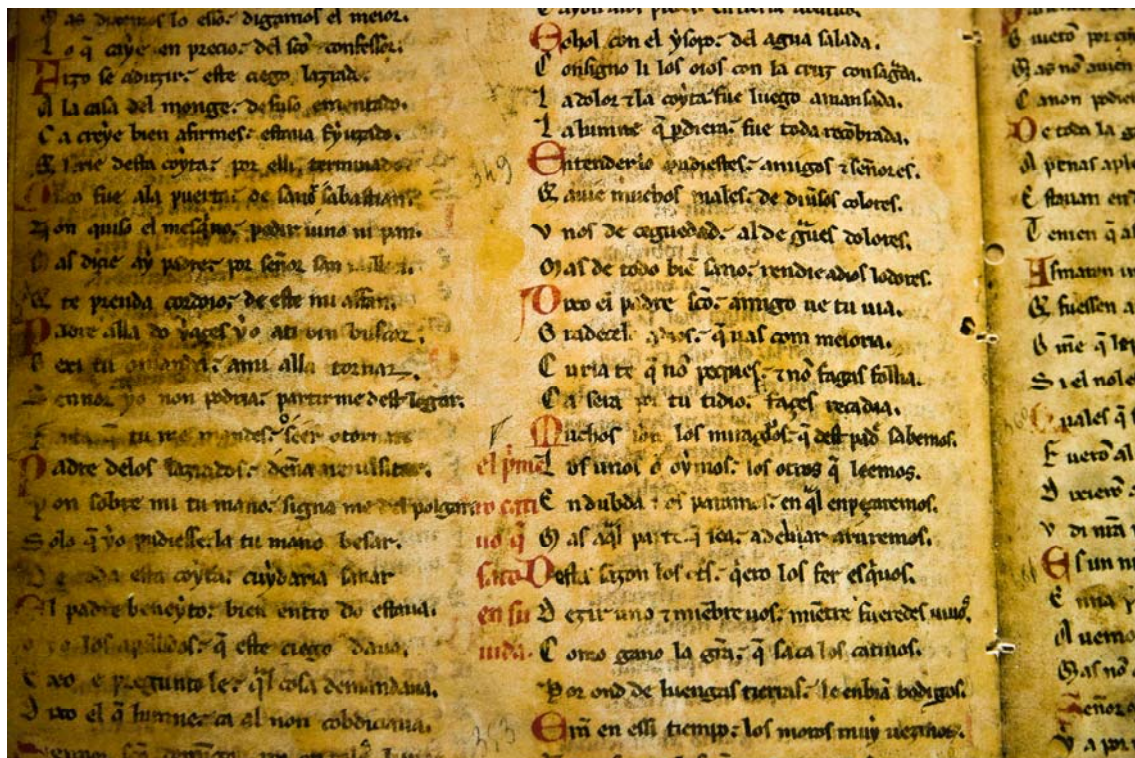
I would also encourage all those who regularly read and review books to pay attention to the manner in which Carson engages a work. I know I learned much about each book he interacted with and additionally, I noticed ways in which I can improve my own approach to reviewing books, especially providing a more critical review of a text for which I may find a greater amount of disagreement. Carson is a skilled writer and presenter of information and thus much can be learned from his abilities in this area.

**This is a book I highly recommend to all believers. In a day and age when so many desire to challenge the authority, sufficiency, and inspiration of Scripture, it is important to be well versed in how to respond to such challenges.** Furthermore, it is also necessary to understand in a deeper and deeper manner how to properly study Scripture so that we may grow every closer to God in our studies of His Word so that we may properly wield the Sword of Truth as we interact with those who so desperately need to hear its message of salvation and redemption.



## The Bible and the Interpreter

By Dave Jenkins



**The word *interpret* can be used to mean “to understand”, “to translate”, or “to explain”.** These three functions of the interpretive process are also appropriate for preaching. First, we seek to understand *what the text is saying*. Then, we translate that information into the *intended theological message*. Finally, we explain *that message to the congregation*.

The interpreter needs to have a working knowledge of basic principles of interpretation. These hermeneutical principles are like the tricks of the trade for an interpreter. They guide us in our examination of the text so that our work is kept within the bounds

of legitimate hermeneutics. The assumption behind these principles is that, properly handled, the text will disclose its meaning to the interpreter.

Interpreting the Bible—*hermeneutics*—is the science and art of understanding, translating, and explaining the meaning of the text. To guide this process the preacher can follow basic principles that help him discern the intended meaning of the text writer, rather than imposing his own ideas on the text. Here are seven principles I would recommend.

### 1. **Identify the kind of literature your text is for insight into its meaning.**

Bible scholars call this the *genre* of the text. That means the general form the text takes—Narrative, Prophecy, Poetry, History, Gospel, and Epistle. The various kinds of literature present their message in differing styles and with different structure. Narrative texts do not operate the same way epistles do in getting their message across to the reader.

The variety in literary forms can become a complicated study. Biblical scholars go beyond the basic forms I mentioned here to sub-forms with subtle differences that the ordinary reader might not notice. Often they disagree with one another about these subtleties. In spite of these technical distinctions, the preacher can still recognize the text's form and how it affects the meaning.

"Identifying these themes and understanding how they relate to one another in your text is a most helpful key to grasping its meaning."

### 2. **Consider the context of the passage for a better understanding of its meaning.**

This is often considered the first and most important principle for accurate interpretation. Biblical scholars use the term *context* to discuss various aspects of the original writing of the text—historical, social, political, religious, and literary. It is this literary concern I have in mind as the *context* of the passage.

The writer follows a logical line of thought in what he writes. What he said in the previous verses or chapters and what he said in the ones that follow will help make the text in question clear. Taking the text out of that context risks misinterpreting it. Often clues in the surrounding verses will open aspects of the meaning in your text you would have otherwise missed.

### 3. **Read the text for its plain and obvious meaning.**

A common and persistent myth about the Bible is that its real meaning is hidden behind the surface message. Even though the Bible uses symbolic or figurative language, most of it is clear to the reader. Even when you do not know about the people, places, and events in question, you can grasp the point of the text.

The use of figurative language in scripture only enhances the plain meaning of the text. "Why do you complain about the splinter in your brother's eye when you have a plank in your own eye?" Jesus said (Matthew 7:3 NIV). Even though this is figurative

language, we have no trouble understanding what He meant. His use of the metaphors makes it even clearer.

#### **4. Try to discern the writer's intentions when he wrote the text.**

This principle of intentionality is critical for the expository preacher. You study the text not to find a sermon in it but to discover the writer's intended message. Unless you can learn the intended meaning of the text writer, you will not be able to preach the message of the text in your sermon. Remember, "The text cannot mean what it never meant." Discovering the writer's original meaning is your first task as you prepare to preach to your own generation.

The intended meaning of the text writer will also be the intended meaning of the Holy Spirit who inspired him to write. As you read his words, you are dealing with a revelation from God. Remember, "All scripture is God-breathed" (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:16 NIV). The same Holy Spirit who inspired these words in the first place wants this message to be preached again through your sermon. And you want to preach in a way that is in line with the Spirit's purposes.

#### **5. Look carefully at the language of the text for what it reveals about its meaning.**

Words carry thoughts. The words of the text are all we have of the writer's thoughts. If he hadn't written it down, we wouldn't know what he was thinking. So we can look closely at his words, examining each one carefully for the part it plays in his message. Also look at how the words and phrases connect with one another and how the sentences are constructed.

If you can study the text in the original language, you can gain greater insight into the meaning. Many preachers study Greek and Hebrew for that reason. But even if you cannot read your texts in those languages, you can still use lexicons and word study books to guide you. Though your congregation is probably not interested in the Hebrew and Greek, your study will open insights that will make the message clearer to them. You can do this without going into detail about tenses and forms in the original languages.

#### **6. Notice the various theological themes in the text.**

Though a text has one intended meaning, it can have a number of significant theological themes. It can also have a number of different applications. When you work on and write down your observations, you will list these themes and what the text says about them. Identifying these themes and understanding how they relate to one another in your text is a most helpful key to grasping its meaning.

These same theological themes will show up in different combinations in various texts throughout the Bible. In your preaching text you will try to discover the best wording for the writer's *subject* and the *modifier* that limits and focuses it. You will also look through the text for the *predicates*, the various things the writer is saying about his subject. The theological themes in the text will give you what you need for these tasks.

**7. Always take a God-centered perspective for interpreting your text.**

This means looking at the text in terms of what it reveals about God and his dealings with His creation, particularly man. This is theological interpretation. It arises from the conviction that the Bible is really God's means of making Himself known to us. What it says about Him will always be central to every text.

The Bible was not given by God to tell us about ancient religious people and how we should all try to be like them. It was given to tell us about the faithful God whom they either served or denied. Their response is not the central message; God's will and His involvement with His creation are. Even texts that give instructions as to how we should behave reveal something about God.

## Reading the Bible for Personal Devotion

By Dave Jenkins

**So you'd like to begin spending time with God daily?**

It's a noble goal and one that every Christian should strive for. Perhaps you just made a personal resolution or you just had a spiritual mountaintop experience and you want to fan the flame of passion you feel for God and His Word. Whatever it is that has moved you to act, you'll have a better chance of developing a daily habit of time with God if you follow these



seven tips for nurturing a daily devotional time with God.

### **1. Pick a time for your devotional reading.**

Make it a priority by calendaring it as you would any other important meeting. We set appointments for much less important things like oil changes, haircuts, and lunches. How much more important is it to have a daily time with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords? The Creator is available to meet with you...are you ready to meet with Him? Set a specific time to meet with Him daily and stick to it.

### **2. Pick a place for your devotional reading.**

I have a favorite loveseat in my home...it's "mine." I love to sitting in this particular place with my Bible near me, a pile of books and a soft drink. I find that sitting here in the same place is helpful and helps me to build memories of what God says during my daily devotional time with Him.

### **3. Pick an accountability partner.**

When you are trying to establish a new habit, it helps to have someone hold you accountable. I want one or two people to have permission to ask me how my daily devo-



tional time is going, what God is saying to me, and whether or not I'm keeping my appointments with God.

#### **4. Tell others.**

Let your Bible study group, spouse, close friend, or children know what you are about to attempt. It is amazing how much more devoted you will be to having a devotional time with God when you know others are watching you to see if you are really serious about it.

#### **5. Don't skip a day.**

This is not to be legalistic, but to make sure that you don't give yourself an "out". If you choose to have your daily devotional time early in the morning, say 6 a.m., you know that you can't do it if you keep hitting the snooze button on your alarm clock. You may be tempted to skip a day and spend extra time with God the next day, but making up lost time rarely happens, and once time is lost, it's lost. Don't talk yourself out of meeting with God, and don't give yourself permission to skip a day. Do a Google search on creating habits and you'll find plenty of evidence that repeating a habit 21 to 28 days in a row is significant in forming an ongoing habit. Some people may need a little longer than that, but the point is, be consistent and don't skip a day.

"Let's face it, our schedules are busy and we lead "time compressed" lives."

#### **6. Reward yourself.**

While meeting with God is its own reward of course, consider giving yourself small incentives for consistently having your daily devotional time. For instance, at the end of your first seven days of consistently meeting with God, take yourself out for coffee or a special dessert. Do something like this at the end of each week, and perhaps build up to something big, like buying yourself a new Bible that will become a part of your daily devotional time, and a reminder of your commitment to meeting with God.

#### **7. Persist.**

Let's face it, our schedules are busy and we lead "time compressed" lives. If you do miss a daily devotional time, don't give up and count yourself a failure. Recommit and begin again. Don't stop having a daily devotional time. That's exactly what the enemy would like you to do, so don't.

Beginning a daily devotional time with God can truly be a life-changing experience. You have every possibility of growing closer to the Lord than ever before as you get to know Him through prayer and the reading of His Word. Your time with God will be motivated by your deep love for Him and the grace He has poured out on your life, not just keeping an appointment so that you can check a box. Allow yourself to experience the blessings of spending time with your Savior and allow Him to transform your heart so that you reflect the image of Christ to others in your family, neighborhood, and workplace.



## **Now Develop Your Passion**

Here's eight more tips to help you develop a passion for reading the Bible for personal devotion:

### **1. We can give God our devotion.**

The first benefit of time spent quietly with the Lord each day, is that it allows us the opportunity to give to God, instead of getting from Him Psalm 29:2. Some Christians may overemphasize their work for God and neglect to spend time simply worshipping Him. God deserves and desires our devotion (John 4:23). How long has it been since you sat quietly with Jesus and simply told Him, "I love you?" When was the last time you sang a worship song to Him outside of a church service?

### **2. We get direction from God.**

Daily Devotions give us direction from Him for our daily lives (Psalm 25:4-5). When we sit quietly with the Lord it gives Him a great opportunity to speak to us and give us the wisdom we need to make the right choices. In our fast-paced world, we desperately need to slow down and hear from the One who knows the end from the beginning. Ask God to show you His will for the day and commit your schedule to Him.

### **3. We gain strength.**

Standing up to sin is no easy task. Just like athletes, our Christian Daily Devotions keep us training for any obstacle headed our way. We build strength every day so when we need it, we can run our race! (Hebrews 12:1-3) By keeping our minds focused on God through our Daily Devotions, we can overcome anything with Him.

### **4. We stand still.**

In a world that's faster than ever, we may find it's hard to sit still even for a moment. But the Bible lets us know how important that can be! (1 Samuel 12:16) Give yourself an excuse to stand still and reflect on God's glory. It will help you find peace every day. And on days you "Don't have time" to do so, consider taking twice as long on your devotion—you may need it!

### **5. It brings our family together.**

Your family may live on other sides of the world, speak multiple languages, or have multiple generations in one home. Carve out time to spend time not only with God, but with each other every day.

### **6. We gain delight in God.**

Spending personal time with the Lord means we will grow our love for Him and find time to bask in His presence. The secret of real joy comes from knowing God (Psalm 34:8, Philippians 3:10).

### **7. We get to know Jesus personally.**

Do you know Jesus Christ personally, or do you merely know about Him? When we know a person intimately, we:

- Spend quality time together.
- Enjoy meaningful communication.
- Know what each other's likes and dislikes are.

When we expect to meet with Jesus during our daily devotion each morning we will never be disappointed. We will always find that He's waiting to meet with us too.

### **8. We grow more like God**

How do we become more like Jesus? We are made holy through the Word (John 17:17; Romans 12:2). Our sanctification comes directly through the time we spend in the Scriptures, getting to know God intimately and allowing His Word to correct our hearts.

## What is Biblical Preaching?

By David Steele



**One of the most penetrating series of imperatives that explode from the pages of Scripture is found in Paul’s letter to his young protégé, Timothy,** “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4:2, ESV).

Preaching has fallen on hard times. There is an increasing intolerance for preaching

in the church. Paul warns Timothy that the day is coming when people will grow impatient with preaching. They will resist the ministry that faithful preachers are called to engage in: “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4:3-4).

This is exactly where we find ourselves today. The Greek word, *anēchō*, translated “endure” means “to be patient” or “to accept”. Paul’s warning to Timothy then indicates that people will not accept sound teaching. That is, they will recoil at biblical exposition. Rejecting such a ministry never occurs in a vacuum, however. When people repudiate the ministry of the word, they exchange the truth of God for a substitute. In this case, they turn to teachers who tell them what they want to hear. False gospels, such as prosperity theology, thrives in this context, as people flock to hear about health, wealth, and man-centered ideology.

But Paul he not deterred. The imperative is still in force. He charges Timothy to “preach the word.” The Greek phrase, *keirúdzō tòn logon*, means “to herald, proclaim, or announce.” The ministry of the proclamation is not for the faint at heart. It is not for the timid. And compromisers need not apply.

God is looking for preachers who herald the truth with passion, power, and conviction. He is looking for faithful men who will wield the mighty sword so the nations would find their joy in Jesus. God calls men of the Book to boldly announce the saving benefits of His Son, in the power of the Spirit, for the great benefit of sinners.

Biblical preachers *must be ready in season and out of season* (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4:2). They preach Christ with bold resolve—both in times of fruitfulness and times of famine. Nothing deters the faithful preacher of God’s Word. He is unmoved by criticism and unhindered by persecution. This is a man who is transfixed by the Word of God and compelled by God’s Spirit to faithfully proclaim the unadulterated truth of Scripture. This is a man who is riveted by the reality of the gospel. This is a man who is untouched by the stain of the world, the lure of pragmatism, and the opinions of men. This man is ready in season and out of season.

Biblical preaching is marked by three critical characteristics: challenge, warning, and exhortation. These imperatives in 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4:2 serve as immutable anchors that guide the tone, strategy, and message of the preacher.

First, biblical preaching *challenges* people. The word translated, “reprove” (*élégchō*) means “to expose or convict”. This kind of preaching helps uncover sin in the heart of the listener. It challenges his worldly presuppositions. It reveals an evil heart of unbelief.

Frankly, in our day, preaching that challenges people is hard to find. The church is awash in “preaching” that follows a therapeutic model and coddles peo-

ple. Much of the preaching in our generation is man-centered. This kind of preaching is not only semi-Pelagian; it is sub-gospel.

Second, biblical preaching *warns* people. Paul urges the young pastor, Timothy, to “rebuke”—a word that means, “to reprove or censor”. Preaching that rebukes offers a stern warning to sinners; it reminds them that sin is serious, that sin has a price. Preaching that rebukes, reminds sinners, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death” (Proverbs 14:12, ESV).

Preaching that rebukes, reminds people that sin must be accounted for. That is, sinners must either bear the weight of their sin in hell, or Jesus must bear the weight of all their sin on the cross.

“Timothy’s mandate was to preach the Word...”

But once again, the kind of preaching that warns is rare in the contemporary pulpit. Much of the preaching today is filled with anecdotes, warm stories, poems, and platitudes. Much of the current preaching is designed to tickle ears and fill pews. The end result is spiritually hungry and impoverished congregations.

Third, biblical preaching involves *exhortation*. The Greek term, *parakaleō* means “earnestly urge; to implore; to invite.” John Piper refers to this kind of preaching as “expository exaltation”, which involves a kind of holy gravitas and pleads with people to follow earnestly after the Lord Jesus Christ. Preaching that exhorts summons people to live to the glory of God. This kind of exhortation is a sort of divine invitation, a plea to walk according to the Spirit, to be people of the Book, and to place Christ above all.

### Preach the Word

Timothy’s mandate was to preach the Word: “Timothy was to herald God’s Word with the authority of heaven behind him. The Word of God is what both sinners and saints need. It is a pity that many churches have substituted other things for the preaching of the Word, things that may be good in their place, but that are bad when they replace the proclamation of the Word.”

The mandate has not changed, nor has it been altered. Our call is to preach the Word. God calls pastors to herald the truth in season and out of season. This proclamation must be marked by biblical challenge, warning, and exhortation. Biblical preaching is not dialogue. It is not a two-way conversation. It is not a comedy routine. Rather, biblical preaching involves proclaiming the timeless truths of God’s Word in a way that honors the Lord Jesus Christ and

builds up the Body of Christ. To do any less is to violate the clear teaching of Scripture.

Several years ago, I had the privilege of hearing Dr. Steven J. Lawson stand before the preacher's desk in Orlando, Florida. Lawson uttered one sentence that is forever etched on my heart and mind. These words encapsulated the three-fold imperative to challenge, warn, and exhort. At the conclusion of the sermon, I asked him to inscribe those words on the flyleaf of my Bible, as a permanent reminder and a personal challenge in my own pastoral ministry:

***“Now is the time for the strongest men to preach the strongest message in the context of the strongest ministry.”***

Martin-Lloyd Jones says, “The work of preaching is the highest and the greatest and most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called... The most urgent need in the Christian Church today is true preaching; and as it is the greatest and the most urgent need in the Church, it is obviously the greatest need of the world also.” May we be faithful biblical preachers who proclaim the Word of God without compromise. And may Christ receive the glory as His Word is heralded for the great benefit of sinners!

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## Drinking Deeply from the Fountain of Biblical Theology

By David Schrock



**When Jesus approached His two disciples departing Jerusalem on the day of His resurrection, He asked,** “What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?” (Luke 24:17). Deftly, he quizzed them about the events of his own death, burial, and resurrection. To this inquiry, these disciples report the somber facts:

*Jesus of Nazareth...was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people...our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and be-*

*sides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see” (verses 19–24).*

What follows is one of the most exhilarating moments in all Scripture, where “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he [Jesus] interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (verse 27). For the two hours it took to walk to Emmaus, Jesus explained how the Hebrew Scriptures foretold of His coming—only the disciples did not know it was Jesus speaking. Indeed, through this guided tour of the Bible, Jesus illumined their minds before opening their eyes to reveal His identity (“And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him” [verse 31]). Following this epiphany, the two disciples observe, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened the Scriptures?” (verse 32). This, I contend, is biblical theology.

Biblical theology is the cohesive interpretation of the whole counsel of God’s Word, which (1) centers on Jesus Christ, (2) unifies the divergent parts of God’s Word, and (3) creates awe in the hearts of true disciples. Or at least, this is how biblical theology began on the Emmaus Road and continues through the New Testament.

After Christ sent the Spirit to inspire the New Testament writers, we find apostles and prophets bearing witness to Christ by means of applying the Old Testament to Him *and* to the Church Christ is building. This inspired “biblical theology” continues today, but without the assurance of inspired interpretation of the now completed canon. Indeed, like the disciples who walked with Jesus in Luke 24, all who read Scripture to know and love Jesus through the whole Bible are pursuing a biblical theology.

That said, biblical theology has developed into something far more than just a cursory application of Old Testament texts to Jesus. Accordingly, growing disciples may be helped by understanding biblical theology and how it relates to them today. What follows, therefore, is an introduction to biblical theology that relates the experience of the Emmaus disciples to the larger theological discipline of biblical theology.

### **Belying Up to the Bar of Biblical Theology**

In his introductory article on “Biblical Theology” in the [\*New Dictionary of Biblical Theology\*](#) (henceforth, *NDBT*), Brian Rosner defines biblical theology in two ways.

- *Biblical theology is principally concerned with the overall theological message of the whole Bible. It seeks to understand the parts in relation*

*to the whole and, to achieve this, it must work with the mutual interaction of the literary, historical, and theological dimensions of the various corpora, and with the interrelationships of these within the whole canon of Scripture. (pg. 3)*

- *Biblical theology may be defined as theological interpretation of Scripture in and for the church. It proceeds with historical and literary sensitivity and seeks to analyze and synthesize the Bible's teaching about God and his relations to the world on its own terms, maintaining sight of the Bible's overarching narrative and Christocentric focus. (pg. 10)*

Rosner's complementary definitions, unpacked in his explanatory article, introduce twelve précis articles on biblical theology. If time and finances permit, order *NDBT* and read its first 112 pages to reflect on this. In those twelve articles you will find a well-ordered and near exhaustive primer on biblical theology. For instance, you will find concise and annotated statements about::

- The history of biblical theology.
- The challenges and problems of biblical theology.
- The canon of Scripture and its role in biblical theology.
- The nature of Scripture and its effect on biblical theology.
- The history of redemption as historical discipline underlying biblical theology.
- Exegesis and hermeneutics, of which biblical theology plays a key part.
- The unity and diversity in the Bible, which biblical theology must analyze and synthesize.
- The use of the Old Testament by the New Testament, and how that impacts biblical theology.
- The way systematic theology depends on *and* contributes to biblical theology.
- Preaching as the goal and test of biblical theology.

As you can see, biblical theology is a theological discipline and hermeneutical tool with lots to offer. To be fair, this list may look intimidating and unappealing. But I pray it has the opposite effect. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus whose hearts burned when Jesus spoke to them, I pray the prospects of understanding how the whole Bible works together, displays the suffering and glory of Christ, and applies to life today might impel you to belly up the bar of biblical theology.

Indeed, more than any other discipline—and here, I'm speaking anecdotally—I have found biblical theology to be more helpful in knowing and marveling at God and His Word. It has given me a firm foundation for tackling every theological or ethical subject that our church has encountered. And it has heightened my

adoration for God and His wisdom and power revealed through His Word. In this way, while the discipline of biblical theology should not be confused with the glorious riches of Scripture itself, it is this approach to Scripture which has been most helpful in studying and savoring Scripture. To put it plainly, biblical theology is my cup of choice when drinking from the Word of God.

To introduce biblical theology, I will not explain all its facets. Again, I cannot improve upon the *NDBT*. Instead, I will make a case why you need to incorporate biblical theology into your personal study, your church ministry, your theological formulation, and your personal evangelism and disciple-making. By putting biblical theology into practice, so to speak, I hope you will better understand what it is, how it works, and why it is a theological discipline worth a life time of study and devotion.

### **Biblical Theology in Your Bible (Reading)**

The first thing to notice about biblical theology is that it takes its cues from the Bible itself. As we saw in Luke 24 above, Jesus' approach to identifying and explaining Himself was to trace "his story" through the Law and Prophets. Indeed, if the books of the New Testament are any indication of the way He taught his disciples (Acts 1:3), we have evidence that Paul, Peter, Luke, and John were all biblical theologians more than systematic theologians. In other words, Scripture is not a systematic theology, written out with propositions and proof-texts. Rather, it is a "theological narrative" promising, recording, and interpreting the works of God. Accordingly, when we read the Bible we should be aware of a number of biblical-theological realities. These realities can be outlined with three questions.

#### **1. What time is it?**

Whenever we read the Bible, we must recall *when* the author is writing. For example, when Peter says, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16), does he have in mind the same application as Moses whom he quotes? Leviticus 11:44 is the verse Peter quotes, but in that context purity and holiness is directly related to food laws, the very thing God told Peter to rescind in Acts 10–11. This is but one example of why the *when* matters.

The Bible is not a record of timeless truths; it is a covenant document which reveals the ways in which a holy God atones for and dwells with His people. Accordingly, we who take the Bible seriously must employ a biblical-theological category of progressive revelation and learn how to read the Bible in time.

#### **2. Who else said it (before)?**

Next, we must pay attention to the middle column of our Bibles, where the cross-references live. While cross-references are not inspired, they do open our eyes to see how the Prophets of Israel read the Law, and how Jesus interpret-

ed the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. In other words, because the Bible regularly cites, alludes, and echoes other parts of Scripture, we must learn to read individual passages in light of their various cross-references.

To be clear, recognizing the cross-references is not the same as reading them rightly. There are whole courses in seminary devoted to intra-biblical exegesis—the practice of reading any part of the Bible in light of the whole. So, exhaustive understanding of all cross-references should not be our goal (yet). What I am commending is a growing awareness of the Bible’s “wormholes,” the ways in which various parts of Scripture separated by space and time are yet related.

So, the growing disciple should read his Bible with an eye to the cross-references. Even better, annotating your own Bible with various cross-references should be a habit to cultivate, as it will help you to see how the Bible is connected. Over time this attention to cross-references will acclimate the reader to the ways in which Scripture refers to itself and more importantly to the God who reveals Himself supremely in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1–3).

### ***3. How does this relate to Christ and His gospel?***

Finally, we should be aware of the way all Scripture points to Christ (John 5:39; 1 Peter 1:10–12). For instance, when Paul defines the gospel he regularly affirms its origin in the promises of the Old Testament. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, he says that Christ died for our sins and was raised to life on the third day “according to the Scriptures.” Likewise, Romans 1 speaks of the “the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures” (verses 1–2); and Galatians 3:8 speaks of the “gospel preached beforehand to Abraham.” Add to this the evangelistic preaching of Acts, which explains the work of Christ by repeated reference to the Old Testament, and we begin to understand that Scripture’s main message—the gospel—spans the whole canon.

Whether in the New Testament or Old, we should ask ourselves: How does this person, event, institution relate to Christ? In the New Testament this is apparent, as all commands to the church come to those who are “in Christ”. But also in the Old Testament, if we follow the apostles’ lead, we soon learn that the gospel which is fully revealed in Christ (Ephesians 3:1–11), was preached beforehand (Galatians 3:8) and anticipated by the Old Testament Prophets (1 Peter 1:10–12).

For instance, John records how Moses wrote of Christ (5:46), Abraham rejoiced to see Christ’s day (8:56), and Isaiah saw the glory of Christ beforehand (12:41). From just a sampling of New Testament texts, we learn a faithful reading of the Scripture must include an awareness of how any passage relates to God and the Christ who mediates between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5). Clearly, mediation is a doctrine for salvation, but also for hermeneutics, and thus biblical theology helps us in our daily reading to find a faithful path *in the text* from the words on the page to the Word become flesh. This is where we begin with biblical

theology, but it cannot be where we end.

### **Biblical Theology in Your Church**

When Michael Lawrence wrote his book on the subject, he entitled it [\*Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church: A Guide for Ministry\*](#). Likewise, when 9Marks entitled their journal on biblical theology, they called biblical theology a “guardian and guide for the church.” And in its final article on biblical theology, the NDBT followed Edmund Clowney’s book title, [\*Preaching and Biblical Theology\*](#). In short, those familiar with biblical theology know it is a discipline given for the life and health of the church.

In particular, biblical theology is important because it explains who Jesus is, as the head of the Church, and who the Church is, as the people whom God promised to redeem when he told Abraham that through his offspring all the nations would be blessed (see Genesis 12:1–3 and Galatians 3:8ff.). In truth, it is impossible to know who the Church’s Lord is apart from both testaments of the Bible. The Old Testament describes who the Messiah is; the New Testament then shows how Jesus of Nazareth is the long-awaited Son of God come to redeem Israel and the nations. Only through biblical theology do we learn who Jesus is. To worship and serve any other Jesus is to worship a false Christ. Therefore, in the Church, we must regularly identify who Jesus is and who he is not, and there is no better way to do that than to place Jesus in the storyline of the Bible, and to understand how our churches relate to that storyline.

At the same time, biblical theology gives us a grasp of how Israel relates to the Church, how Jesus stands as the promised one of old and the cornerstone of the new. Biblical theology enables us to think carefully about how the Law does and does not apply today. And biblical theology gives us background for all the metaphors about the Church (e.g., the Church as bride, temple, gathering, and royal embassy, etc.). In short, while various systems of biblical theology (e.g., Dispensationalism, Covenant Theology, and Progressive Covenantalism) describe continuity and discontinuity differently, they are all *doing biblical theology for the sake of the Church*.

“To be clear, biblical theology in the abstract does not provide a secret decoder ring for Bible doctrines.”

To be clear, biblical theology in the abstract does not provide a secret decoder ring for Bible doctrines. Rather, it serves as a biblically-rooted pattern of thinking, which defines terms according the unfolding revelation of God, identifies the Church according to those terms, and instructs church leaders on how to establish the doctrines and practices of the Church. Without biblical theology, the Church is left to float in the winds of competing fads and sociology’s best ideas for community-building. For anyone who wants to be “biblical,” they must



pursue and possess a robust biblical theology. Individual proof-texts, even collections of proof-texts neutered from their covenantal context, are insufficient.

### **Biblical Theology in Your Theology**

Biblical theology's role in the Church parallels its role in constructing our systematic theology. As mentioned above, biblical theology serves as the baseline for all sound doctrine. Whereas systematic theology can be differentiated from biblical theology, all doctrines must find their "shape" from the progressive revelation of Scripture. To say it differently, every *loci* of doctrine can and should express its contents according to the contours of the Bible. But what does that mean?

Simply this: Because the Bible is revealed over time, its various doctrines also develop over time. There is no doctrine that comes in the mail pre-wrapped and fully-formed. Rather, every doctrine finds contributions from every part of Scripture—or, at least it should. For instance, when God's name was revealed in Exodus 3:14, Yahweh defined Himself as the God who redeems Israel (verses 15–16). In other words, it is in Israel's history, finally realized in Christ and the Church that the full doctrine of God is found. Similarly, attention to historical detail is most important as we grapple with the gifts of tongues in the book of Acts. Only by recognizing the transitional nature of Luke's second volume do we guard ourselves from misreading Pentecost as paradigmatic for every believer's experience.

Even more clearly is biblical theology seen in the doctrine of Christ. Although the Incarnation is not historically revealed until Christ is born of Mary, there are hints that God's redeemer will come as the "seed of the woman" (Genesis 3:15), the son of David (2 Samuel 7:9–14), and a glorious Son of Man (Daniel 7:14) who at the same time will suffer before He rises again (Isaiah 43). While these revelations take the fullness of time to see and understand, the New Testament clearly affirms the Prophets spoke beforehand about the Son, His suffering and His glory (Luke 24:45–49; 1 Peter 1:10–12). All our doctrines, therefore, should follow this promise and fulfillment pattern of revelation as we aim to describe various doctrines. In short, biblical theology is the beginning place for all sound doctrine.

### **Biblical Theology in Your Evangelism**

Finally, biblical theology stands as the foundation of any fruitful evangelism and disciple-making. As mentioned above, the gospel does not begin with Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Rather, as the apostolic sermons of Acts (and Hebrews) demonstrate, the apostles who first gave us the gospel regularly preached about Christ from the Old Testament. In fact, until the New Testament canon was fully recognized in the early fourth century, the Church had the Hebrew Scriptures. And thus, the message of Christ was patterned after God's own promise-fulfillment schema (Acts 13:32–33): what God promised in the Old Testa-

ment, He fulfilled in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20). This is the basic shape of the gospel, and hence as it is modeled by Peter, Stephen, and Paul, it should find its way into our own personal evangelism.

“At the end of Luke’s Gospel, the good doctor finishes his presentation of Christ with the Sermon on the Emmaus Road.”

Practically, [\*Two Ways to Live\*](#) follows this redemptive historical approach to the gospel, as does Matt Chandler in his book [\*The Explicit Gospel\*](#). In Chandler’s book, he describes the “gospel in the air” (e.g., Creation, Fall, Reconciliation, Consummation) as

an approach that follows Scripture’s own presentation of redemptive history (i.e., God’s work of salvation over time). Similarly, what I call the “horizontal gospel” is an approach undergirded by biblical theology that moves from Creation to Fall to the Law and its fulfillment in Christ and his New Creation—first in individuals (2 Corinthians 5:17), later in all creation (Revelation 21–22).

This ‘storified’ approach to evangelism benefits the individual disciple because it situates Christ in God’s storyline, and it demands that uber-personal narratives be redefined by God’s larger redemptive story. Such an approach makes it impossible to add Jesus to our own stories; it demands sinners submit themselves to God and His gospel, turning from their old stories and placing faith in the resurrected Christ, the Lord (read: star) of God’s story. While salvation remains personal, such a biblical-theological approach places the individual in the larger structures of God’s redemption. At the same time, such a narrative approach to the gospel helps us communicate the gospel to others.

Since we all inhabit the same story, there can be no personal experience that stands outside of God’s world and God’s salvation. To a generation indoctrinated on the belief that individuals have the power to define themselves, biblical theology provides a robust counter-argument to hyper-autonomous self-determination. Indeed, by providing a more majestic story of savior-identification (not self-identification), biblical theology’s natural environment is evangelism and discipleship. Which leads to the final point, young disciples need biblical theology.

At the end of Luke’s Gospel, the good doctor finishes his presentation of Christ with the Sermon on the Emmaus Road. Similarly, Matthew finishes his Gospel with an equally climactic presentation. On a mountaintop in Galilee, Jesus tells His disciples to go into all the world and make disciples (Matthew 28:17–20). He calls them to baptize these disciples and to teach them to obey all that He has commanded them. Like Jesus’ teaching in Jerusalem (Luke 24:45–49), this final instruction is equally attuned to biblical theology. For it calls disciples to know the whole corpus of God’s Word and to be able to teach it to others, so that a new generation might obey all that God in Christ has instructed us.

To be sure, this calling to obey *all* God has commanded is massive, but that is the very reason why we need biblical theology. Biblical theology gives us an approach to getting our hands around the whole counsel of God. It gives us a plotline, chapters, categories, and emphases. It shows the ways in which patterns repeat in Scripture, and how all the divergent material in Scripture is unified in Christ. For this reason, biblical theology is not an optional discipline, but a necessary part of discipleship and disciple-making. Therefore, it should not be something that is an esoteric part of a seminarian's education. It should be the bread and butter of any church's teaching and any disciple's diet.

### **Take Up and Read Biblical Theology**

For all these reasons, take up the Bible and read, and with it, grab a handful of books on biblical theology to help you put its pieces together. Start with the [NDBT](#), or Graeme Goldsworthy's [According to Plan](#), or any other resource listed above. In reading them you will find there are some divergent opinions on the best way to "do" biblical theology. But far worse than running into some differing approaches is to remain entirely indifferent to biblical theology.

Therefore, take up and read biblical theology. It will, by God's grace, prove immensely helpful. It may, as it has for so many others, prove to be one of the ways God matures you and multiplies fruit in your church, your theology, and your disciple-making. Indeed, this was Jesus' aim on the road to Emmaus, and His ongoing prayer at the Father's right hand, that the people for whom He died would be sanctified in truth. And His word is truth—all of it, from beginning to end.

## Reading the Bible with the Church

By Dave Jenkins



**Bible reading, meditation, journaling, meaty theology books—they are crucial and quite individualistic.** And while there is a place for your personal, passionate pursuit of God, the Bible was never meant to remain a solely singular endeavor. The Word of God was and has always been

a community experience.

These books, letters, stories, poems and prophecies are meant to be read aloud. It is the call upon the people of God to worship Him through His Word, recounted and recited in the midst of biblical community.

[Dr. Jeff Arthurs presents five reasons](#) why the public reading of Scripture is integral to Christian community worship, not as mere perfunctory recitation but as impassioned and Spirit-empowered speaking of the very words of God:

1. ***We are commanded to read the Bible publicly.*** Referring, of course, to 1 Timothy 4:13, “Devote yourself to the public reading.” We are a forgetful people, all too often foggy in our thinking and heart’s desires. We need to be reminded who we are, so God commands us to read Scripture devotedly and publicly.
2. ***When we read the Bible publicly, we do what the people of God have always done.*** Based on the prominence public reading of Scripture has had through the millennia, Timothy Ralston concludes, “Public reading and preaching within the worship exposes [God’s] demands, our inadequacy, and his grace. It calls for covenant renewal and lies at the heart of spiritual revival. Therefore, how can we offer acceptable worship, if his Word does not have a prominent

place in our liturgy?”

3. **God transforms us through the Word.** Dallas Willard explains with an analogy: “In the same way that your hand moves in response to your thought and emotion,” just so does God perform his will (creating, ruling, and redeeming) through the unmediated extension of his will expressed in words. “What we call natural laws, then, must be regarded as God’s thoughts and intentions [that is, his words] as to how the world should run.”
4. **The Bible was meant to be read aloud.** Before it was inscribed on vellum and papyrus, the stories, proverbs, and poetry of the Bible circulated orally, and after the oral literature was written down, it continued to be transmitted orally. Literature in the ancient world was spoken, not read silently, even when reading privately. This is still the case today in much of the worldwide Church, and that is appropriate because the Bible was meant to be received aurally.
5. **Hearing the Word is different than reading it silently.** Hearing and seeing a reader embody the text is a different experience than silently pondering a script in the privacy of the study. Have you heard the Word read well? Vistas of new understanding and worship open as the people of God receive His words together.

These reasons form a basis for seeing the Scriptures as a community treasure. Reading the Word in community need not be long-faced and doleful. It should come alive with the very personalities behind the words themselves.

“Until I come,” says the apostle Paul, knowing that his death is imminent, seizing, perhaps, the opportunity to give direction to the church for the centuries ahead, “give attention” (NASB), or “devote yourself” (NIV), “to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.”

It’s clear enough what the apostle Paul wants done in the public assembly of the church. He wants Scripture read. The practice of the synagogue was to unroll the scrolls of Scripture, read a portion, mark where they stopped, and then the next Sabbath pick up again where they left off. The reading was *lectio continua*—consecutive, sequential readings—not, by the way, *lectio selecta* readings, selected from here or there.

Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:16–19) and the apostle Paul at Pisidian Antioch and elsewhere (Acts 13:15; 19:8) provide examples of this public discipline in action. We have as well the Apostle James’ explanation of the practice of the synagogue: “For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath” (Acts 15:21, NASB).

“Moses,” he says, “is read in the synagogue every Sabbath.” It is to this practice that the Apostle Paul refers and that the early church had adopted. Liturgical scholars agree that *lectio continua* reading was the practice of the early church from the time of the apostles through the patristic period.

Following Gregory the Great (540–604 A.D.), the medieval church

adopted a *lectio selecta* approach to the readings. But selected readings were unsatisfactory to the Reformers, who almost without exception required in their liturgical reforms that extensive *lectio continua* readings be restored to the public services of the church. *Lectio continua* readings of Scripture were the practice of Reformed orthodoxy until well into the nineteenth century.

What is a proper sermon? It is an explanation of the reading. When Jesus concluded the reading from the prophet Isaiah at the synagogue at Nazareth, **“the eyes of all...were fixed upon him”** in anticipation of His comments. “And he began to say to them,” Luke tells us next. Jesus, by providing expository comments, followed the pattern expected in the synagogue service (Luke 4:16–21).

The expectation of exhortation based upon the reading can be seen in the synagogues in Acts also. The Law and the Prophets were read, as can be seen in Acts 13:15a. Then the synagogue officials asked of the apostle Paul: “If you have exhortation for the people, say it.” Scripture reading led directly to interpretative comments and exhortations. Moses is preached in every city, James maintained, because “he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath” (Acts 15:21). Reading and preaching are not synonymous, but they may be juxtaposed in the manner James does because they are seen as inseparably linked, the preaching arising out of and dependent upon the reading. This would seem to be the natural context of the Apostle Paul’s exhortation to Timothy to “give attention to the public reading of Scripture,” and the “exhortation and teaching” that arises out of reading (1 Timothy 4:13).

The practice of the synagogue became that of the apostolic church, and then of the patristic church. The sermons of Clement of Alexandria (150–215 A.D.), Origen (185–254 A.D.), Chrysostom (347–407 A.D.), and Augustine (354–430 A.D.) provide abundant testimony to the practice of sequential expository or *lectio continua* preaching in the early centuries of the church.

Medieval preachers abandoned the patristic practice and preached largely topical sermons. But the Reformers, on the basis of their study of Scripture and the Church Fathers, restored the earlier practice of *lectio continua* preaching. Zwingli, Bucer, Capito, and Calvin, among many others, were all *lectio continua* preachers. They preached verse-by-verse through the books of the Bible.

**Extended readings are virtually non-existent in today’s market-driven church environment.** Topical sermons, only slightly related to a text of Scripture and addressing felt needs, have become the norm. But if we are convinced that we are born again by the living and abiding word (1 Peter 1:23), that we are sanctified by the truth (John 17:17), and that our souls, as the Apostle Paul says here, are “nourished on the words of the faith and of sound doctrine” (1 Timothy 4:6), we will require a prominent role in the public assembly for the Word of God, whether for our personal benefit or for the sake of the health and well-being of the whole church.



## Three Keys to Sermon-Listening and Note-Taking

By Dave Jenkins



**Going to church each Sunday and sitting under godly, loving, biblical, and practical preaching week in and week out should be enjoyed as a privilege by God's people.** While

some people, like myself, learn best by sitting and listening, I know many people get more out of sermons by taking notes. When I'm listening to a sermon I try to always do the following three things:

Open my Bible and follow along as the pastor preaches the Word. Listen for key ideas/points. Learn to interpret the biblical text from your pastor.

### **1. Open Your Bible**

First, open your Bible and follow along as the pastor teaches the Word. Whether you have a Bible app on your phone, or you have a physical copy of God's Word, always be sure to have your Bible open so you can follow along as the pastor is preaching. Paul commended the Bereans (Acts 17:11) because they checked to see if what he was saying was biblical and the Thessalonians for how they received the Word of God (1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 2:13).

As Christians, we should be known for our love for God. A real love for God will produce a love for His Word, His people, and His Church. We are living in a time when

biblical illiteracy is on the rise. By opening your Bible during the week on your own, at Bible study, and on Sunday at your local church, you can grow in your knowledge, understanding, and application of God's Word. This is why opening your Bible and following along as your pastor preaches the Word is so important—it will help you see what your pastor sees in the text, which will help you to learn how to read the Bible well on your own.

## 2. Listen for Key Ideas/Points

Second, listen for key ideas/points. Some pastors provide an outline for you to follow during the sermon. I encourage you to follow along with the outline and fill it in as the pastor preaches. This outline is a key tool to help you take notes. Typically, my pastor has his main points in the outline with words the congregation should fill in. He also has a few applications points for how we can apply the message to our lives. If you are like me, you might also occasionally write further thoughts and sometimes these thoughts have even become future articles.

“Listening well and taking good notes during the sermon is a means to an end.”

While you're listening to the sermon look for key ideas. These may be points the pastor brings out in his sermons, but it also may be a thought brought to mind by the Holy Spirit. These are important insights to write down because while they may be for that moment, they may also be for later in the week, or further down the road to encourage you or others. As a Bible teacher, sometimes I'll repeat something a few times to help the listener un-

derstand how a particular point is critical to the whole message. The essential point here is to pay attention throughout the sermon to the key ideas that are meaningful. Those may be the ones the pastor mentions, but they also may be something else that is helpful to you. Pay attention, take notes, and write down key ideas/thoughts as they come to you during the course of the sermon.

## 3. Learn to Interpret the Biblical Text from Your Pastor

Third, learn to interpret the biblical text from your pastor. In the Bible study I lead at church, we're going through the Gospel of John. I've told the men that come that one of the objectives I have for this study is to help them learn how to read and interpret the biblical text. One of the main objectives for faithful verse-by-verse preaching is that, week after week and year after year, people get to see how the pastor reads, understands, and interprets the biblical text. This is one of the primary reasons why verse-by-verse expository preaching is so important. People today simply don't know how to read and interpret the text.

In my experience, when people read a biblical text, they first read *themselves* into the text rather than allowing the text to simply *say what it means*. This results in people wrongly handling the Word of God. As Christians, we should be known for handling the Word of God well (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2:15). The faithful pastor preaches the biblical text with a view to helping people to see how they got the points they did from the text under consideration. In other words, the faithful pastor exegetes the biblical text in order to help the people of God see what the text teaches, by drawing it out in helpful

ways so people can learn to interpret the biblical text themselves.

### **Final Thoughts**

Maybe you've never considered listening intentionally to a sermon or note taking. I am always actively listening for key ideas in the message—even if I'm not taking notes. In every sermon, there will be points that you'll find more helpful than others. I encourage you to listen well and take notes if necessary, whether that's on an outline provided, a notebook you bring, or just mentally. As you do so you'll find that you will remember more of the sermons you hear.

Listening well and taking good notes during the sermon is a means to an end. That end is our growth in Christ and understanding of the Bible. You leave church each week sent out on a mission by God to make disciples of the nations for the glory of God. Listening well to what is being taught to you with an open Bible, listening and jotting down key ideas, and watching how your pastor interprets the Bible will help you to grow in your knowledge and application of the Bible, which will in turn help you to grow in the grace of God.

**This week pick up your Bible, read it, study it, and apply it to your life.** The end result of this is that any duplicity in your life will be replaced by a growing hunger for more of Jesus. At the end of the day, that's the goal to not only listening to a sermon well, but a Christian who is taking her own growth in Christ seriously.

## **The Illuminating Work of the Holy Spirit in Daily Bible Reading and Discipleship**

**By Dave Jenkins**



***“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.” (John 16:13)***

In verse 12 of chapter 16 of the Gospel of John, Jesus says, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” This inability reflects not merely the disciples’ weakness, but also the reality that they were still living before the cross. The

pattern of God's revelation is for His saving action first to happen, and then for the biblical teaching to record and explain it. In the forty days after the resurrection, and before His ascension, Jesus would give an intensive course on biblical theology to the disciples. Still, He promised to send "the Spirit of truth" to complete their education after He had gone, guiding them "into all truth" (John 16:13).

**This statement indicates a progressive unfolding of God's revelation.** We see this in the relationship of the Old Testament to the New. They present the same salvation, but there is growth in terms of clarity and maturity. In the Old Testament, Christ and His gospel are presented by symbols such as the Temple, the Feasts, and especially the animal sacrifices. At no time, however, does the Bible teach that sinners are forgiven because a lamb or goat died in their place. Rather, the sacrificial animals drew a picture of the true Savior and Lamb of God, Jesus, who would shed his blood for our sin.

John 1:29, "The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" answers the great longing of the Old Testament. This shows the organic connection between the salvation doctrine of the Old Testament and that which has progressed in the New Testament.

"A biblical understanding will agree that God still speaks to the world today, but will deny that God is still granting revelation."

Seeing this progressing within the Bible, some scholars erroneously conclude that this revelatory process continues beyond the Bible. This is the teaching of the Mormons, who hold that the nineteenth-century musings of Joseph Smith were the continued revelation of God to His Church. The idea of new revelation from God is common to all the cults, including Mormonism and the Jehovah's Witnesses. A similar problem is being seen in the Roman Catholic Church, with its emphasis on the extra-biblical and counter-biblical teaching passed down through the popes and councils. Another version of this problem confuses the Holy Spirit's special inspiration of the apostles with the idea of human inspiration.

A biblical understanding will agree that God still speaks to the world today, but will deny that God is still granting revelation. God speaks to His people in the Scriptures, which are His final revelation to mankind before the return of Christ in glory. This realization is essential for the life and health of the church. Those who assert that God is continuing to give revelation consider the New Testament to be an incomplete and provisional revelation. Under this view, especially when linked to an evolutionary theory that grants those currently living a superior capacity for inspiration and understanding, the Bible's clear teaching on sexual immorality, gender distinctions, and even the gospel of salvation are replaced with more current, worldly doctrines.

When Jesus spoke of a future revelation, He did not mean that there would be a needless progress in divine disclosure throughout human history. James Montgomery Boice explains, "Jesus is teaching that the Holy Spirit would lead the disciples into a supplementary but definitive new revelation that thereafter would be the church's authoritative standard of doctrine."<sup>[i]</sup> The writer of Hebrews (in Hebrews 1:2) said, "In these last

days God has spoken to us by his Son”, indicating that the apostolic witness to Christ in the New Testament is the last revelation of God to mankind. Notice as well that Jesus tells the disciples that the Spirit will guide them into “all the truth” (John 16:13). Jesus was not promising to reveal all truth to them, as if they would know everything about everything. Nor was Jesus promising that the Spirit would teach them only some truths. Rather, it was “all the truth,” that is, the whole of the fixed body of Christian doctrine that would be contained in the New Testament.

**Once we understand the New Testament as God’s final revelation setting forth His salvation in Jesus Christ,** we may then grasp the essential

role played by the Holy Spirit. John 16:13, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.” This promise was given specifically to the eleven disciples, and provides the basis for their inspired writing of the New Testament. By describing the third person of the Trinity as “the Spirit of truth”, Jesus was acknowledging His suitability for granting this God-breathed revelation. The Spirit’s character is that of truth, the Spirit has an inherent love of truth, and the Spirit has perfect knowledge of the truth, which He would commit to the apostles for the Church.

While divine revelation was committed to the apostles, the Spirit who revealed God’s Word to them continues to work today to enable Christians to believe, understand, and adore the apostolic doctrine. Just as the Spirit guided the Apostles into the knowledge and teaching of the whole counsel of God—“all the truth”—the Spirit opens our eyes to the body of doctrine in the New Testament and enables us increasingly to embrace it and experience its power.

The Spirit is our guide today which is why Paul urges us to “walk by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16) and “keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25). We follow along with the Spirit’s guidance as we study, believe, and obey His revealed Word in the Holy Scriptures. Just as the original disciples were not ready to receive Christ’s full doctrine until they had received the Holy Spirit, men and women darkened through sin today need the light of the Holy Spirit to illumine the sacred page to their understanding. Christians should always study and teach God’s Word asking in prayer for the Holy Spirit’s aid and power.

The Spirit guides us into all truth and declares God’s truth to our own spirits. His aim in doing so is to display the glory of Christ for our faith, adoration and service. John 16:14, “He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” There are three important applications from this principle of the Spirit’s Christ-centered witness. The first is that this rules out the Holy Spirit’s being at work in any religion that denies Jesus Christ. We increasingly hear in our ecumenical world that Jesus must be at work in other faiths. We are told that to believe that the Spirit speaks only in Christianity is an intolerable arrogance. But Jesus states that the Spirit’s ministry is directed toward the revelation of His glory, declaring only the things of Christ. Thus the Spirit is at work only where the biblical teaching of Jesus is believed and proclaimed.

What is true of false religions is also true of false professors of Christianity. Those who disobey the teaching of Scripture by deserting a spouse, pursuing an agenda of greed or pride, teaching unbiblical doctrines—or worshiping according to worldly principles—



only deceive themselves if they claim the leading of the Spirit, who serves and glorifies Jesus alone.

Second, this tells us that the hallmark of the Spirit's presence and activity is an intense focus and excitement. When the focus is placed on the Spirit Himself, rather than on the person and work of Christ—and especially His sin-atoning death on the cross, we can be sure that the Spirit is not working.

The third application is that the intent of the Spirit's work in our lives, and therefore the purpose of our study of the Bible and faith in its doctrines is that we would be drawn closer to Jesus Christ. It is popular today to speak of being a spiritual person. But if we are speaking of the result of the Holy Spirit's work in our life, the result will and must always be a keener interest and delight in Jesus, a more fervent love and devotion for Jesus, a firmer trust and reliance on Jesus, and a life that is increasingly yielded in obedience and service to Jesus. This is why Jesus said in John 16:7, "It is to your advantage that I go away", since once enthroned in Heaven He would send the Spirit, and the Spirit working with power in our hearts will draw us to a closer discipleship to Jesus than was possible even for the original disciples. Thus, by the Spirit, we may possess a more blessed experience of the saving benefits that Jesus has provided for us.

### **True Riches in Christ Alone**

Once we realize the purpose for which the Spirit was sent into the world, we will not only recognize that our calling is summed up in our relationship to Christ, but also realize that the treasure of God for us are all found in and summed up in Christ. John 16:15 states, "All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you." Christian salvation is Trinitarian—it brings us the blessing of each of the persons of the glorious Godhead: God the Father to take us as His children, Christ the Savior-Shepherd to gain us salvation, and the Spirit-Helper to guide us into all the truth and unite us to Christ, in whom all divine blessings are found.

This raised the question: If we have Jesus through faith and in Him we have the riches of God, what else do we need to lead lives of peace, joy, and spiritual power? Through the God-given means of His word and of prayer; we receive the ministry of the Spirit. He has come not to deny us riches and pleasure that we could otherwise find in the world but so that we might enjoy true riches and true life, by the Spirit and in Jesus Christ—the riches of eternal life and glory that God the Father has provided for us only in His Son.

#### **Reference:**

[1] James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 4:1217

## **The History of Interpretation and Current Approaches to the Bible**

**By Dave Jenkins**



**Throughout the centuries there have been hot debates about the meaning of Scripture.** In fact many church councils were called to end what was considered heretical teachings and debates about the meaning of God's written Word. At the heart of all biblical interpretation lie two basic questions: (1) How many meanings can a text have, and (2) Where is/are the meanings found?

In the history of the church there have arisen two views of the Scriptures and their proper interpretation: (1) Scripture meaning lies only in its primary, historical

sense, or (2) Scripture's ultimate meaning lies in its fuller, revelatory sense.

### **The Early Church**

The early Church Fathers in the second century found much of their truth in the teachings of the Apostles. These men had to fight many rising heresies such as Gnosticism and other false teachings, which threatened to dilute or destroy true faith. Beginning with Ignatius and then progressing with Justin, Irenaeus (ca. 140-202 A.D.), and Tertullian (ca. 155-212 A.D.), there developed the idea that to correctly read, interpret and understand the Scriptures, one must study under the guided authorities of the bishops of the church. This seemed a very necessary approach at the time to safeguard the infant Church from growing heresies. By the time of (and through the work of) Irenaeus, the Old Testament Scriptures were understood to point to Christ, through types and shadows. His work provided the key for theological interpretation which found its total focus in the Incarnate Christ. As a result of this approach, a 'rule of faith' was developed and most interpretation needed to pass through that rule.

As time passed, in the theological circles of Alexandria, creative biblical interpretation took off through the work of Clement (ca. 150-215 A.D.) and Origen (ca. 185-254 A.D.). The style of Christian allegorical interpretation developed. This assumes that the Bible intends to say something more than what its literal wording suggests, that is, the Bible has deeper, mystical meanings together with the plain meaning. Origen created a basic two step approach to interpreting the scripture whereby the Bible student first discovered the literal, plain meaning and then the deeper, spiritual interpretation.

The Alexandrian school of biblical interpretation was soon challenged by the leaders of Antioch where the Antiochene School of interpretation arose. The brilliant scholars, John Chrysostom (ca. 347-407 A.D.) and Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca. 350-428 A.D.) emphasized a literal and historical approach to the Scriptures. They focused on the biblical writers' aims, motives, usages, and methods in which a literal-historical sense of Scripture was primary and through it, moral implications and applications must be made.

As the church approached the fifth century, Augustine of Hippo (ca. 354-430 A.D.) and Jerome (ca. 341-420 A.D.) established the course for this period. They emphasized a more balanced approach of Scripture emphasizing the literal meaning, the allegorical meaning and above all the theological meaning.

### **The Middle-Ages**

Out of this more balanced approach of the late Church Fathers arose a powerful four-fold approach to biblical interpretation which was carried into the Middle-Ages:

- The literal - historical sense
- The allegorical sense - deeper meaning for theology and faith
- The tropological sense – what people should do
- The analogical sense – what does this mean for future and for eternity

This method was clearly used by Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153 A.D.), but later Thomas

Aquinas (1224-1274 A.D.) rooted the spiritual meaning of Scripture much more securely in the literal meaning. He taught that all deeper, spiritual interpretation had to flow out of the clear, literal meaning of the text. He, and others after him, clearly taught that the historical, literal meaning of Scripture was clear, but the full and final meaning of the text was in no way restricted to what the first audience thought or heard.

### The Reformation and Reformers

Martin Luther (1483-1546 A.D.) and Erasmus (1466-1536 A.D.) pushed forward a strong return to earlier principles favored by the School of Antioch years ago. These men and other Reformers rediscovered the priority of the literal, historical sense of Scripture. Luther broke the stronghold of allegorical interpretation of Scripture feeling he must stress the historical sense which will in turn provide a framework for sound doctrine. He insisted that the Bible itself is its own best interpreter.

John Calvin (1506-1564 A.D.), one of the pivotal figures in biblical studies during the Reformation period, developed the grammatical-historical method of interpretation focusing on the meaning of the text in its historical sense (what it meant to the first hearers in their situation and their time period) and then deriving all spiritual messages directly from the text. Calvin said:

“As time passed, instead of vibrant faith-filled hearts, confessional orthodoxy emerged in the church.”

*“Since it is almost the interpreter’s only task to unfold the mind of the writer he has undertaken to expound, he misses his mark, or at least strays outside his limits, by the extent to which he leads his readers away from the meaning of his author.”*

Lastly, both Luther and Calvin formed the Christological method of interpretation; that is, that all Scripture has as its primary purpose to reveal Christ and His redemptive work, therefore, all Scripture must be interpreted, applied, and experienced in its revelation of Christ and His work.

### Biblical Interpretation since the Reformation

Although the Reformers moved us back to safer ground with the literal-historical approach to interpreting the Scriptures, over the years, this resulted in a dogmatic approach to the Bible. A dogmatic approach represents a moving away from a living, active theology to a ‘rule of faith’ which every person *must* believe in order to be in the faith. As time passed, instead of vibrant faith-filled hearts, confessional orthodoxy emerged in the church. As ‘Enlightenment’ thinking hit the world, many rejected this dogmatic rule of faith. A new found *pietism* emerged in Philipp Jakob Spenner (1635-1705 A.D.) and August Herman Franke (1663-1727 A.D.). This pietism focused on a real experiential reality of God and of biblical morality. This has led people to read the Bible more devotionally as they focus upon experiencing God, moral obligation, and practical application of the Scriptures. The weakness of this period has been very little new thought of true biblical interpretive methods.

### Current Approaches to the Bible

Christians believe that the Bible is God's revelation of Himself and of His will for man. But this basic presupposition is sometimes qualified by other views. Four different approaches to Scripture—that is: the naturalistic, super-naturalistic, existential and dogmatic—need to be recognized. These approaches will often yield totally different interpretations of the same passage of Scripture.

#### Four General Approaches

It is common to isolate four general approaches to Scripture:

- Scripture may be viewed rationally and equated with any other literature.
- Scripture may be viewed reverently as a supernatural book.
- Scripture may be viewed existentially by way of personal experience.
- Scripture may be viewed dogmatically through a system of doctrine.

It is important to see that we all approach the Bible with our own viewpoint and presuppositions. We now consider how different sections of the Christian church view the Scriptures.

### The Evangelical View of Scripture

Evangelicals hold the Bible to be God's written Word. But beliefs within evangelical circles vary on the doctrines of inspiration and revelation. A fundamentalist approach to Scripture may emphasize the divine involvement in its production to the exclusion of any human contribution; likewise, a dogmatic approach to the Bible may limit its message to a fellowship or denomination.

"Evangelicals believe that the Bible is God's Word..."

Generally speaking, however, conservative evangelicals take the view that *'Christ and the Apostles viewed the Bible as a document written by men, to be sure, but at the same time as a document whose source was God himself.'*

This view embraces what is called a grammatical-historical approach to Scripture – an approach adopted in this book. Evangelicals use a number of meaningful terms in reference to the Bible.

### God's Word

Evangelicals believe that the Bible is God's Word and reject the view that it just contains God's word as insufficient. A number of arguments support this belief, for example:

- The Scripture's internal testimony (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:16; 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1:21; Revelation 22:18-19).
- The unity of the Bible. Considering that its 66 books have been written over a period of 1600 years by some 40 different authors, writing on different continents in two or three languages, using different literary styles, the unity of the Bible is extraordinary. This unity is evident in its consistent witness to

one God. It is true that there are differences (some would say contradictions) in some passages, but these can often be explained. Continuing research is accounting for some difficult passages.

- The fulfilment of Bible prophecy is a powerful argument to the authoritative nature of Scripture. Daniel's prophecies about world empires came to pass. Many Old Testament prophecies have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Following Jesus, the early Church used proof texts to demonstrate the fulfilment of Scripture (Luke 24:27, 44).  
"The influence is an ongoing one, it begins with conversion and continues in sanctification."
- Archaeology has given support to many biblical statements about places, events and people.
- The witness of Jesus Christ to the inspiration and authority of Scripture has to be faced. A disciple of Jesus Christ must accept the Master's view.
- The literary excellence of the Bible suggests its divine inspiration. As a library of books the Bible represents some of the world's richest literature.
- The divine authorship of the Bible can be sensed in its moral laws and judgments.
- Laws such as those found in the Decalogue (or Ten Commandments) have a universal application (Exodus 20:3-17).
- Born-again Christians testify to the transforming power of the Bible in their lives.

This influence is an ongoing one, it begins with conversion and continues in sanctification. The prayer of Jesus for his followers, *'Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth'* (John 17:17) is realized by the Scriptures. The Bible is essentially a book of salvation. Its concern is God's relationship with man, and man's relationship with God. As such evangelicals refer to its infallibility and inerrancy.

### **Infallible**

We affirm that God's Word is infallible because God is infallible; if we affirm that God speaks through the Bible we must speak of its infallibility. But the word infallible requires careful definition. J. I. Packer says:

*'Infallible' denotes the quality of never deceiving or misleading, and so means 'wholly trustworthy and reliable'; 'inerrant' means 'wholly true'. Scripture is termed infallible and inerrant to express the conviction that all its teaching is the utterance of God 'who cannot lie', whose word, once spoken, abides forever, and that therefore it may be trusted implicitly.*

### **Inerrant**

'Inerrancy' implies the absence of error. Like 'infallible' the term is a corollary of divine inspiration. B. Milne states:



*If the Bible has been supervised down to its very words by the God of truth, we can be confident that it will be free from error. Thus whenever the Bible prescribes the content of our belief (doctrine) or the pattern of our living (ethics) or records actual events (history), it speaks the truth. Again we must make clear that the degree of inerrancy claimed in any particular passage is relative to what the text intends to teach; when a passage of Scripture is interpreted in accord with the writer's intention and in harmony with other biblical passages, its inerrant truth will be plainly perceived.*

### **Further Clarification of the Terms Infallible and Inerrant**

We need to make two observations on the use of the words 'infallible' and 'inerrant':

- First, the terms are not used to suggest that the biblical writers had irrefutable revelation into every realm of human knowledge. The Bible is not a scientific textbook but a book of salvation. As J. I. Packer says, "It claims in the broadest terms to teach all things necessary to salvation, but it nowhere claims to give instruction in (for instance) any of the natural sciences, or in Greek or Hebrew grammar..." In reference to the Old Testament, Paul said to Timothy, 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness' (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:16).
- Secondly, the terms refer to the infallibility and inerrancy of biblical teaching, and not to any man's interpretation of that teaching. Nor does the reliability of Scripture depend upon any person's experience.

### **Propositional Revelation**

Evangelicals believe that the Bible consists of revealed truths, that is, of verbal statements about God and His purposes, His will, His predictions and promises. This is contrary to the belief of some biblical scholars, who state that God has revealed Himself solely in acts of history. Revelation, according to them, comes through salvation history and not through pronouncements. Such a view dismisses the testimony of sacred history itself, and limits the ability of God to communicate with His children.

"A belief in verbal revelation may be held as a necessary truth."

The subject of inerrancy has been a hot issue of debate among evangelicals in America fairly recently and resulted in the *Chicago Statement* (1978). If we read the Old or New Testaments we are left with the conviction that God has communicated with people through their experiences *and* His spoken word. For example, the Old Testament story of the Exodus would not be the same without the stories of Moses and his divine call to lead his people.

A belief in verbal revelation may be held as a necessary truth. What, for example, would we make of the person and work of Christ without an explanation? How

could we arrive at convictions about His divine nature and saving work without theological interpretation? For a start, according to the Apostle Paul, we would view Christ's crucifixion simply as a human execution or a divine cursing (1 Corinthians 1:23). Jesus would just be an example of how to live and die!

### **Reliable and Trustworthy**

Following on from what we have said, it should be observed that God's acts and words are very closely interwoven in Scripture. You cannot tease divine sayings out of the narratives that reveal the actions of God and leave the stories intact. At this point the Bible challenges our faith—we accept its testimony as it is or we reject it. Here is a faith statement: "Since God is the author, all the Bible is *wholly trustworthy*... Since the Bible is the Word of God, it is considered absolutely trustworthy in its overall message and in each part of the revelation."

### **The Liberal Protestant View of Scripture**

In comparison to evangelical belief and statements, naturalistic approaches to the Bible allow for nothing supernatural.

#### **Rationalism**

Rationalism came with the Enlightenment, which followed in the wake of the Reformation. Once men were able to think for themselves, and the sciences became dominant, the authority of the Church and Scripture was challenged.

Rationalists rely on their own reasoning as the ultimate authority. Liberal Protestant theologians take a rationalistic view of Scripture. "The Bible may contain the Word of God, along with many errors," they say. Ideas of revelation or inspiration are often rejected. Further, the reality of miracles, Satan, demons, creation by the Word of God, the *Parousia* (or Second Coming), and Heaven and Hell are similarly repudiated. Human reason and 'the spirit of Christ', it is maintained, are needed to decide which parts of Scripture are true and which parts are false.

So-called Higher Criticism has received a bad name due to the fact that many nineteenth and twentieth century biblical scholars were rationalists, whose views colored critical studies. We need to update our awareness here. We live in a post-modern age where the authority of science and technology has been questioned and re-evaluated. All knowledge is now taken to be meaningful. The rise of New Age religions are evidence to the fact that spiritual experience is now taken seriously. The statement is a generalization. It is so easy to pigeonhole scholars and misrepresent their theological beliefs.

### **The Neo-Orthodox View of Scripture**

While rationalism is outmoded, subjectivism is in fashion. Existentialism, which majors on human experience ("my experience") has colored approaches to the Bible in the twentieth century.

#### **Neo-Orthodoxy and Existentialism**

Some Protestants believe the Bible to be God's Word only in the sense that it *contains* God's Word. Furthermore, it only becomes so by personal faith. The Bible is not, does not contain, objective truth. Existentialism places an emphasis on the individual, and sees an irrational 'leap of faith' necessary in order to experience a word from God. Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855 A.D.) is often called the father of Christian existentialism.

He reacted against the formality of the Dutch Reformed Church and the way that people seemed to lose their personal identity as they entered the Church. His religious works include *Fear and Trembling* and *The Concept of Dread*. Karl Barth, Emil Brunner and John Baillie represent neo-orthodoxy. This school holds that God has revealed Himself in acts rather than words. To Barth the Word of God is not a revelation in itself, but an instrument of divine disclosure: it is personal but not propositional. For Barth the Word is Christ. The Bible witnesses to Christ. Christ, to Brunner, is the Word in Scripture. What matters is man's encounter with God.

So, evangelicals take the orthodox view that the Bible *is* God's Word; liberals believe the Bible *contains* God's Word; while the neo-orthodox hold the belief that the Bible may *become* God's Word through experience. But only one view (the orthodox view) is correct. Only when we hold to this view can we correctly practice hermeneutics.

#### References:

- i. D. Dockery & G. Guthrie, *The Holman Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, Nashville, 2004, p. 25.
- ii. Ibid, p. 28, 29.
- iii. Ibid, p. 29,30.
- iv. Ibid, p. 30, 31.
- v. Ibid, p. 33.
- vi. Ibid, p. 34.
- vii. Ibid, p. 35, 36, 37.
- viii. R. McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, p. 20. But see the whole of chapter one.
- ix. B. Milne, *Know the Truth*, p. 43.
- x. J. I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, London, IVP, 1958, p. 95.
- xi. R. McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, p. 20.
- xii. Ibid,, pp. 27-35.
- xiii. Ibid, pp. 49-56.
- xiv. It is a disconcerting fact that Pentecostal and Charismatic preachers often side (unwittingly I hope) with modern interpretations of Scripture by stating that the Bible only becomes the word of God through personal experience.

## Reading Your Bible: Building a Passion for God and His Glory

By Dave Jenkins

**One of the greatest needs for Christians today is open their Bible's and read it. You may have decided that this was going to be the year when you read through the entire Bible.**

You may even have been regularly reading your Bible and be at the point where you've gotten

to Leviticus, or one of the books of history, and stopped. I understand how that is, and have been stuck there before. Let me ask you: Do you feel discouraged? Do you feel like life is caving in all around you? Do you feel that no matter what you do all you do is seeming to fail? The reason for that is because, as a Christian, you are suffocating for lack of food and water.

Now that I have your attention with that last sentence let me explain what I mean. As Christians, we've been given the Word of God, which is not a book of fairytales and myths. The Word of God is living water to the Redeemed, Bread of Life to the hungry, and a Treasure to all who call on the name of the Lord God. Jesus teaches these truths in John 7:37-38 about the living water. In John 6:35, Jesus states that He is the Bread of Life. Christians are to seek after the Lord with all of their heart, mind, and strength (Mathew 22:37-40). Christians are to delight in the Lord, who delights in them, now in and through Christ.



You may not feel like reading your Bible right now. It may only seem like words on a page, but those words are *powerful*. They are God's means to cut to the quick, and a balm to heal you and restore in you a passion for the glory of God. The Bible is God's power supply. Through the Holy Spirit, He convicts, comforts, and empowers God's people to carry forth the message of good news in the gospel. Why do Christians often avoid their Bibles? Is it because of apathy? Is it because they get bored with it? I think the reason goes deeper than these questions.

**All of God's people are in ministry full-time.** We all can relate to the business of life. For those who spend most of their time ministering to people in the local church, we give a lot and don't often receive back what we give. The end result is that often we struggle with feeling all alone and become depressed. We become open targets for the enemy and need time to recharge often. One of the reasons why we're often so depleted, I believe, is because we don't spend substantive, meditative, and reflective time in the Word of God. Sure we know what the Bible says and can quote it. Sure we can tell people to go read the Bible. We read our Bibles to get to know the God, who has saved His people, is sanctifying them, and will one day glorify them.

Maybe you determined, with your New Year's resolution, to read your Bible. Perhaps you didn't. Now is a good time to start. Life isn't going to get any easier. Jesus didn't promise His people a bed of roses—He promised to transform His people from lovers of self into lovers of His cross. He promised that the Cross would so shape our lives that we would be known by it and transformed by the power of God through it. This is why reading the Bible is so important. From cover to cover, the Bible testifies to the message of the cross and resurrection of Christ.

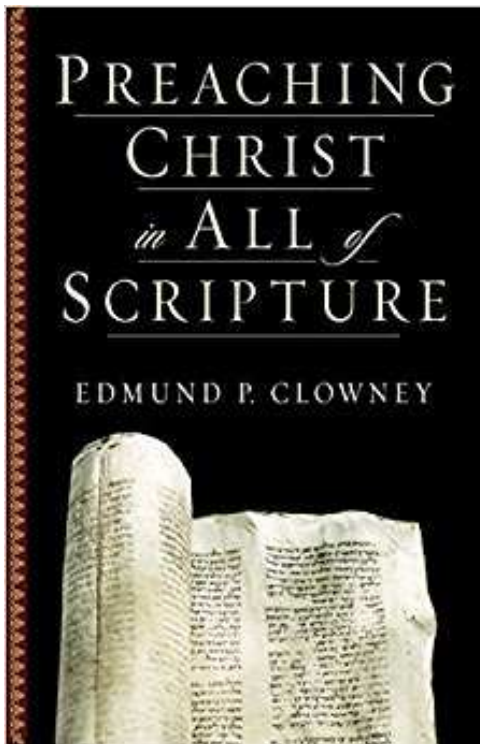
The next time you feel that you don't want to read your Bible, I encourage you to pick it up and crack it open anyway. Take up and read because the Bible is the living water God has promised for your soul. Reading the Bible will refresh you in the Lord. As someone wisely said, "If you want to hear God speak, read the Bible. If you want to hear him speak audibly, read it out loud." If you're wondering why God isn't answering your prayers, I encourage you to read your Bible since it is God's inspired, inerrant, sufficient, and authoritative Word. When the Bible speaks, God speaks which is why our response to the Word should always be one of obedience.

**Today, I urge you to open your Bible and read it. Or, if you prefer, go get one of the many Bible apps, like YouVersion and start reading or listening to it on your phone.** Whatever you do today, resolve to read your Bible. The Lord uses the Word of God in the life of His people to encourage and convict them. The Lord also uses the Word of God as a balm to comfort the afflicted, and to afflict the comfortable. Resolve to grow, not only in your ability to minister to others, but also in your own personal knowledge of God. After all, our daily lives as Christians should be affected by the truth and reality of the Scriptures. So pick up your Bible, and begin afresh today to see the world as God does through the lens of His Word. This is the year and now is the time to grow in your faith. As you grow in your faith, the Lord will provide opportunities for further service in His time and for His glory. Now go read your Bible, and may God—by His Spirit—grow in you a greater passion for Himself through your own reading of His Word!

## A Book Review:

### *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture*

By Zach Barnhart



**Most of us read the Bible as if it is telling a story, one that culminates in the person and work of Jesus Christ.** We get the overarching narrative of Scripture and can see that Scripture sets out to tell a story about Christ. For some reason, however, it is more difficult to make this transition into the pulpit. A lot of sermons seek to apply to Scripture to their own moralistic purposes, or they simply present the facts of the verses read without pointing to its Christological significance. Thankfully, we have many prominent preachers and theologians like Edmund Clowney to point us back to the true *purpose* of our preaching: to “take account of the full drama of redemption, and its realization in Christ” (11).

In *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture*, Clowney not only aims to convince its readers of the importance of Christocentric preaching but demonstrates it at length. This book is divided into three sections. Clowney first shows the “theoretical foundation” for reading and preaching Christ from the whole of Scripture. Following this chapter, he gives preachers very ground-level wisdom for how to go about actually doing it. The last and longest section of the book is a

collection of sermons from Clowney himself, with the intention of modeling this style of preaching.

I found this second section to be the most beneficial for me of all. Clowney goes through the process out laying out how we should structure our sermons, pray in our sermon preparation, and lean on the Lord’s presence in our sermon prep and preaching.

**Here are some of the key quotes from the chapter that I underlined:**



- “Careful, devout reflection on the Word of the Lord remains the key to entering his presence in worship.” (48)
- “When preaching from Gospel accounts, do not put the words of Jesus into indirect discourse. Call on your hearers to hear the words of Jesus, and quote them.” (54)
- (Quoting Martyn Lloyd-Jones), “If you are preaching in the energy of the flesh, you will feel exalted and lifted up. If you are preaching in the power of the Spirit, you will feel awe and humility.” (55)

Page 58 is the most valuable page in the entire book, in my opinion. I have “decades of wisdom” written in the margin next to several underlined phrases and points made. This section was extremely beneficial.

“Clowney is obviously a very seasoned preacher...”

I also really benefitted from Clowney’s sermons, because he is emulating and modeling everything he is calling preachers to do by actually disciplining them into the process with an “I do, you watch” approach. These sermons beautifully bring together all of Clowney’s arguments and points made in the first two sections to help us think through how we should think through our own Bible reading and sermon prep. I do wish there had been more of an even balance between preaching methodology (58 pages) and examples (120 pages). Clowney is obviously a very seasoned preacher, and he definitely could have unpacked more of his principles to make it its very own book!

**Nonetheless, the book is still a must-have for preachers,** especially young preachers, as it will really help form us into a proper understanding of our task in the pulpit, and how to go about doing it, with some help along the way from Clowney’s very own mind. *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* is an important volume that I will be sure to return to for its important homiletic reminders.

## Biblical Meditation as Experiential Reading

By Jason Garwood



**Perhaps one of the greatest ironies should be assigned to our current situation:** *we have more access to Scripture and its rich historical truths than ever before, and yet we have in our churches an ever-increasing lethargy when it comes to the exploration of said truths.* In other words, we have the Bible in our pockets with information at our fingertips, and yet we lack a desire to experience the Word afresh. Maybe instead of calling it

an irony, we could call it a tragedy.

The truth is, we have Study Bibles, Bible software, Bible studies, Bible apps, Bible commentaries, Bible dictionaries, Bible lexicons, and extensive works after voluminous works of history's finest theologians—and *we're not any smarter, any more holy, or any more passionate about God and His Word*. What's the problem?

### **Biblical Meditation**

In our drive-through Christianity in America, we value our time and our money, which means we don't have the time or the capital to slow down and digest Scripture. Either we're *not* hungry because we're not walking with Christ, or we *are* hungry, but we prefer the dollar menu rather than the fine dining banquet. *We lack the time, and we lack passion.*

Consequently, biblical meditation requires us to swim upstream from our culture. When the Apostle Paul challenged Timothy to "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15, KJV), I can't believe for one second that he meant it should be *easy*.

Biblical meditation is when the Spirit-filled reader ruminates on the Word of God and is shaped by the Spirit to its message. When a person desires to meditate on the Word, as we are told to do often in Scripture (e.g., Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2, 19:14), he/she reads the words on the page, brings its truth to mind, ponders it in light of what it says about God and his/herself, and seeks to apply it to every aspect of his/her being. While many various Eastern religions emphasize the "emptying" of one's mind, Christian meditation emphasizes the filling of one's mind so as to align with the Triune God.

### **Experiential Meditation**

It is my contention that in order to have a healthy spiritual life built on sound, fervent, and frequent meditation on Scripture, we must do so *experientially*. This is by no means a new concept, for the Puritans built their ministries on this concept. What does it mean to meditate on the Bible *experientially*? Simply put, we are to "love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5).

Experiential Bible meditation is different from what's practiced by many Christians today. Typically the Bible is read in a *superficial* way. The words are read in our minds or even aloud, and instead of getting out the exegetical shovel and doing the hard labor, we move on to the next thing. (Hence the appeal to short devotional readings—we don't have time to spend processing and pondering a passage, so we need someone to help us get a little nugget and get it quickly).

In our 140-character world, it's no wonder we can't dig deep and do honest experiential Bible meditation. We're trained to consume short amounts of information, oftentimes sharing an article on Facebook, for example, because of the headline instead of actually reading the entire article.

Inevitably, this type of culture breeds spiritual lethargy. Therefore, we must slow down and return to experiential meditation—the process whereby we take a verse or a set of verses, and we *spend time* allowing our hearts, minds, souls, hands, and volition to be *shaped* by the Spirit through the Word. It's not enough to just read the Bible; *the Bible must read us*. Meditation is the key to experiential Bible reading. Instead of just reading words and passively processing them, true experiential meditation ought to stir the heart and motivate the hands. To simply read the Bible is to simply hold up a mirror. To read the Bible *experientially* is to *gaze upon the mirror with inquisitive wonder*.

### Experiential Meditation

So how does this work? What does it practically look like? To meditate biblically is to read the Bible through the power and promises of God in Christ. Bible reading ought to point us to Christ and the implications of his Kingdom in the world. Not only do we meditate on the Word for *knowledge* and *understanding*, but we also meditate on the Word for *practice* and *piety*. Orthodoxy leads to orthopraxy. *The Christian life consists of theology going in and doxology going out; doctrine in the heart and mind, worship with our lives*. We dare not only *hear* the word; we must *do the word*, too (James 1:22).

Biblical, experiential meditation means that we focus in on what the Holy Spirit inspired, so we align our heads, hearts, and hands with what God intends to impress upon the soul. The head, heart, and hands paradigm coincides with repentance, faith, and mission.

- **Repentance (Head)** – When reading Scripture, we should, like King David, *weep*. “I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping” (Psalm 6:6). The reason many people fail to exhibit righteous behavior and the fruit of the Spirit is because, in our efforts to follow Jesus, *we’ve forgotten about repentance*. The Christian life is a life of ongoing repentance. If we wish to follow Jesus into the world, we must follow Him *with repentant hearts*. The reason this must start in the head? “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed *by the renewal of your mind*” (Romans 12:2). When our minds are renewed and refreshed, our hearts follow along. Instead of being deceived by our hearts (Jeremiah 17:9), we can be guided by the truth—the *Word of God*. Biblical, experiential meditation on Scripture aims to answer the question: “What sin have I let run amuck in my heart?” This type of meditation requires a true examination of self before God in his presence *in front of his Word*.
- **Faith (Heart)** – The charge of experiential meditation focuses on the gospel of King Jesus which corresponds with the Apostle Paul’s words: “love...from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith” (1 Timothy 1:5). Because the mind is prone to wander, the heart is not far behind. Instead of shrinking back into a lethargically obtuse spirituality, experiential meditation ought to push us to “draw near [to God] with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Hebrews 10:22). We read the Bible to know not just *about* God but to *know* God. When the Spirit works in us, He works via the means of His inspired Word. The Bible ought to be stuffed deep in the soul, so our hearts are set on fire with a passion for the glory of God. It does no good to read the words of Scripture at the surface—we must plunge ourselves by faith into the Word of God so the Spirit can *change us*. It takes time, energy, focus, and affection. The Lord is near to the broken-hearted, so step one is to acknowledge our brokenness. We can then rely on the promises that he is near us, challenging us to grow with a heart full

of child-like faith.

- **Mission (Hands)** – It's not experiential if it doesn't lead us to *act*. The Spirit works in the life of Christians who make it their practice to meditate on Scripture producing heads full of repentance, hearts full of faith, and *hands toiling for the Lord* (1 Corinthians 15:58). Part of the reason the American church has been lazy in mission is because we've been lazy to pursue a heart of faith and repentance. It does no good to talk about disciple making if we can't get the full-orbed Christian life straightened out. The mission of disciple-making and maturing cannot flourish if the mind and heart is not full of the gospel. Biblical, experiential meditation fuels missions. When we are saturated in the Word of God because we've gazed into the mirror of God's Word, *love in action for our homes, church, neighborhoods, and cities is the result*. We want experiential disciples who make disciples who make more disciples. We can't do this without loving others, and we can't love others when we do not love the Lord.

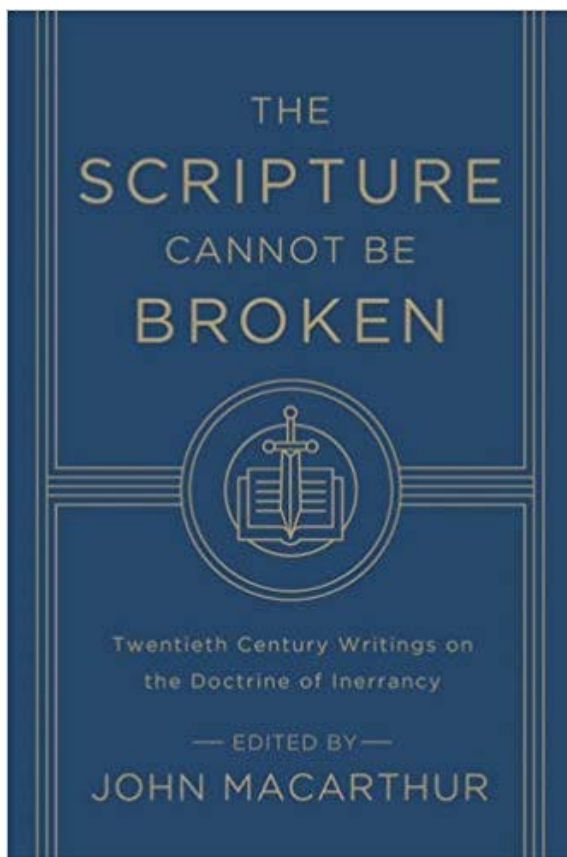
Experiential meditation on the Word of God isn't an end to itself; it begins as a life transformed from the inside out. It is the duty of God's people to shape their minds through godly repentance, aligning their affections with hearts full of faith in a *very* big God, while cultivating a life of obedience to what God has tasked us with: discipling all nations.

**Ultimately, experiential meditation does *not* make us more righteous. Reading the Bible doesn't somehow magically transform your standing before the Throne of God.** *The righteousness you need is in Christ, and you have every last ounce of it.* Experiential meditation helps us live in light of the righteous standing you have before God and leads us to a vibrant, difficult, real, sorrowful, joyful, and holistic walk with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. You *have been* justified by His grace through faith, so now you can *go* in that same inebriating, experiential grace and live an abundant life for His glory.

## A Book Review:

### ***The Scripture Cannot Be Broken: Twentieth Century Writings on the Doctrine of Inerrancy***

By Michael Boling



**Ever since the serpent in the Garden of Eden asked Eve, “Hath God said”, Scripture has been under attack.** Unfortunately, this attack is not merely coming from outside the walls of Christianity. Increasingly, the questioning of the inerrancy of Scripture, in particular, has reared its ugly head within the Christian blogosphere, and also within many so-called “Christian books”—written by pastors who claim to preach the gospel. Perhaps more than ever, it is vital for believers to understand why Scripture is the Word of God, why it is the authority in all matters of life, and most importantly, why it can be completely trusted as the foundation for truth. *The Scripture Cannot be Broken: Twentieth Century Writings on the Doctrine of Inerrancy*, edited by John MacArthur, is an excellent collection of essays that addresses this vital issue.

Building on the work of the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*, the essays provided in this timely book look at the historical elements of inerrancy, engage what Scripture has to say about itself, explore the issue of inspiration, outline what inerrancy is all about, concluding with a brief yet important look at biblical infallibility. Each essay is thorough, well-written, biblically rooted, and well worth taking the time to read.

Dr. John MacArthur is a champion of engaging the issue of biblical inerrancy as attested by the recent Inerrancy Summit that was the focus of the 2015 Shepherd’s Conference. Gathering pastors and church leaders together to discuss biblical inerrancy reveals the con-



tinued importance of ensuring the challenges to this all-important doctrine are addressed. *The Scripture Cannot Be Broken* is appropriately edited by Dr. MacArthur and each contributor to this effort does a marvelous job of engaging and outlining in a lucid,

yet approachable, manner to why believers should understand what inerrancy is all about and why it is so important to hang our proverbial hat on this doctrine.

“One can quickly see that attacks against inerrancy of Scripture are really nothing new.”

I appreciated that the entire spectrum of this doctrine is addressed, notably beginning with the historical basis for this doctrine to include the various controversies that faced theologians throughout the years. One can quickly see that attacks against the inerrancy of Scripture are really nothing new. Challenges to inerrancy will continue to present themselves and the conversations that continue to swirl around a number of topics related to Scripture and the repeated attempts by liberal scholars to diminish the historicity and authority of Scripture will not cease. It is absolutely essential that believers remain cognizant of these attempts and books such as this one perform a valuable function in providing believers with the tools to understand such attacks, and the means to combat with historical fact, and (most importantly) from the pages of Scripture itself those who seek to treat Scripture as nothing more than a collection of moral stories.

**This is a book I highly recommend to be in the collection of all believers, but especially as a resource for pastors and Bible College/Seminary students.** Regardless of whether one is a scholar engaging liberal attempts to push against the foundation of biblical inerrancy, or whether one is a layman who may run across someone who has questions about this issue, we have to understand and be able to elaborate why God’s Word is inerrant and what that means. The outstanding essays provided in this book will go a long way to informing and empowering the body of Christ to declare that God’s Word is indeed inerrant, and how to cogently and powerfully defend the doctrine of inerrancy.

## Recommended Reading on Hermeneutics: the Art and Science of Biblical Interpretation

**This season at Servants of Grace, we've been considering Hermeneutics: the art and science of biblical interpretation.** We are living in a time where many people—though Bibles are a plenty—are biblically illiterate, and don't know how to interpret the Bible. With this issue of *Theology for Life Magazine*, it was our hope that readers would grow, not only in their understanding of how to interpret the Bible, but also the greater redemptive storyline of Scripture.

If you've found this subject interesting and want to study the issue further, please check out the recommended reading list below. These books are at the top of this genre in both excellence and readability.

### **Doctrine of Scripture:**

- *Knowing Scripture* by R.C. Sproul
- *How to Get the Most from God's Word* by John MacArthur
- *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald Whitney
- *Jesus on Every Page* by David Murray
- *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* by B.B. Warfield.

### **Preaching:**

- *Preaching and Preachers* by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
- *Christ-Centered Preaching* by Bryan Chapell
- *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* by John Stott.
- *How to Preach Biblically* by John MacArthur and the Master's Seminary Faculty
- *Feed my Sheep: A Passionate Plea for Preaching Edited* by Don Kistler.
- *On The Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* by John Broadus.
- *Lectures to My Students* by Charles Spurgeon
- *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* by Ed Clowney
- *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* by Graeme Goldsworthy

### **Good Study Bibles:**

- English Standard Version (ESV) Study Bible
- Reformation Study Bible
- MacArthur Study Bible

- ESV Readers Bibles

For more information on Hermeneutics, you can also check out <http://servantsofgrace.org> to view our many articles on the subject.  
In Christ,

Dave Jenkins  
Executive Editor of *Theology for Life Magazine*

## About the Authors:



### ***Michael Boling***

Michael Boling lives in Belleville, IL, a suburb of St. Louis, MO with his wife Erica, adopted daughter Alissa, two cats Molly and Sweetie Pie and horse Beckham. Michael holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Religion (Biblical Studies) from Liberty University and is currently closing in on completing a Master of Arts in Religion (Biblical Studies) from Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary.



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Zach Barnhart currently serves as a church planting resident with Fellowship Church and is pursuing pastoral ministry. He is a college graduate from Middle Tennessee State University and lives in Knoxville with his wife, Hannah.



### ***David Schrock***

David Schrock is married to Wendy and father of three energetic boys—Titus, Silas, and Cohen. He is currently Pastor of Preaching and Theology at Occoquan Bible Church (Woodbridge, Virginia). Adjunct Professor of Systematic Theology (Crossroads Bible College; Boyce College and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary). Associate Fellow for the Ethics and Religious Liberties Commission.

## About the Authors (Cont'd):



### ***Dave Jenkins***

Dave Jenkins is the Executive Director of [Servants of Grace Ministries](#), and the Executive Editor of [Theology for Life Magazine](#). He and his wife, Sarah, are members of Ustick Baptist Church in Boise, Idaho, where they serve in a variety of ministries. Dave received his MAR and M.Div. through Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary.



### ***Jason Garwood***

Jason Garwood serves as Lead Pastor of Colwood Church in Caro, MI, and is the author of *Be Holy: Learning the Path of Sanctification*. Jason and his wife have three children. He blogs at <http://jasongarwood.com>. Connect with him on Twitter: @JasonGarwood.



### ***David Steele***

Dr. David Steele has been in pastoral ministry since 1991. He holds BS and MA degrees from Multnomah University and Multnomah Biblical Seminary and a D. Min from Bakke Graduate University. In 2012, he became the Senior Pastor at Christ Fellowship in Everson, Washington. He and his wife, Gerrene were married in 1991 and they have two children.

## Would you help us bridge the gap?

In 2016, World Family Missions began a program to feed and minister to some of the poorest infants in the Metro Manila area of the Philippines. Monthly sponsors have partnered with us to provide these children and their families with regular meals, life-skills training, educational assistance, and Bible study.

This consistent help is invaluable, but occasionally, because of life circumstances, a sponsor is unable to continue their support. Living conditions also contribute to frequent medical needs like wounds, infections, and infestations of internal and external parasites.

We would like your help building an emergency fund to help bridge the gap in these situations. Just \$40 will give a child access to medical attention and a week of round-the-clock care, if needed. The same amount on a monthly basis will fully sponsor a child in our program, and allow us to continue providing services in the event a sponsor decides to withdraw support. Any amount, big or small, helps!

To make a tax-deductible donation, or to learn more about this program, visit the Gifts page at [www.WorldFamilyMissions.com](http://www.WorldFamilyMissions.com) and click on *Donate to the Formula for the Philippines Project*. Please write "Gap Fund" in the comment area or on the memo line of your check.







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