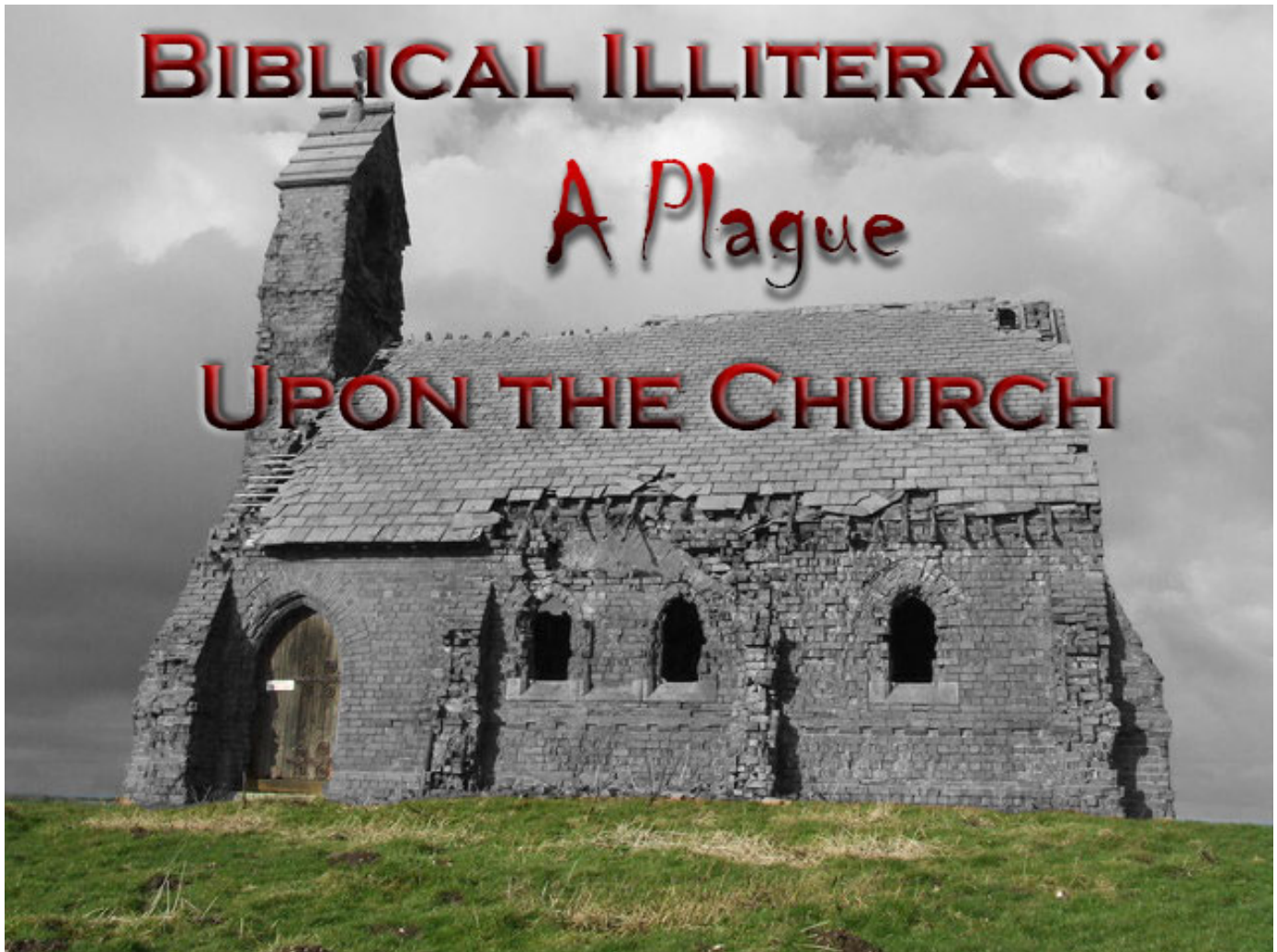


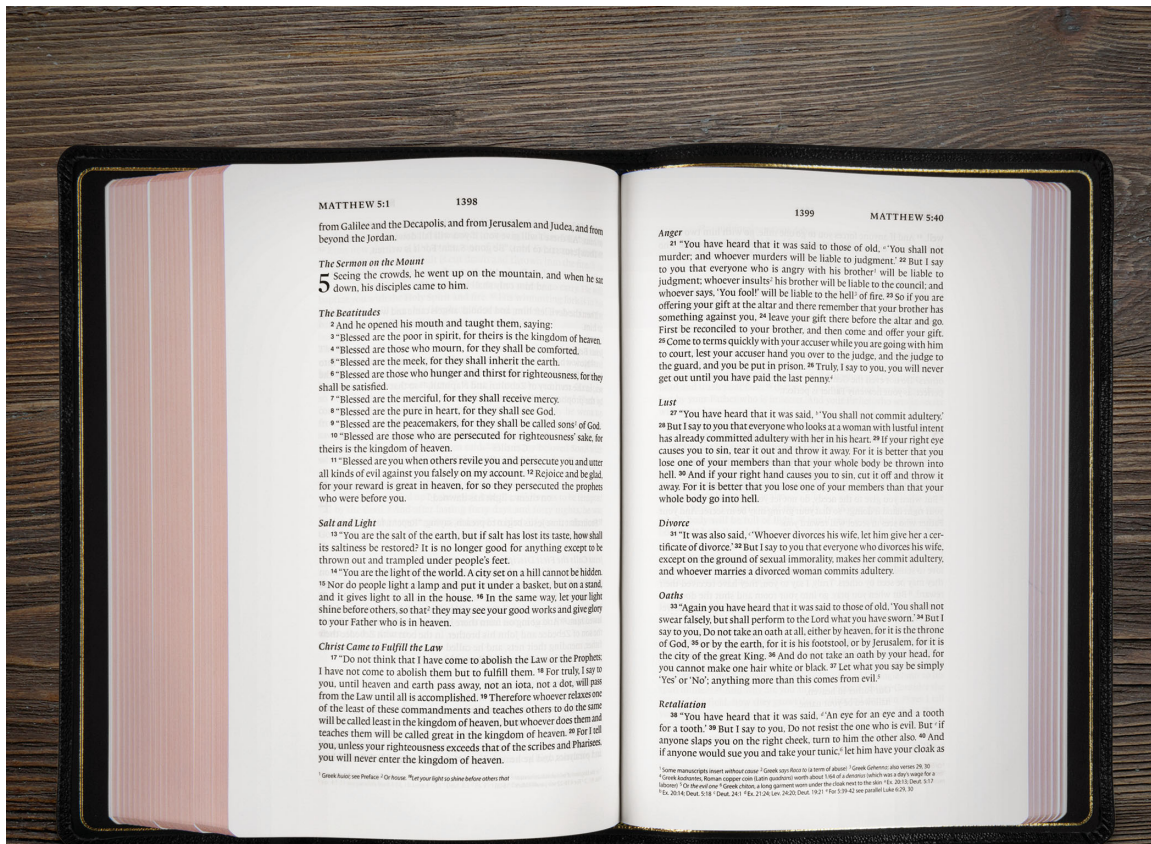
Theology for Life

Volume 8 | Issue 1 | Spring 2021



Inside this Issue...

- Biblical Counseling and Biblical Literacy
- *Another Gospel?* - An Interview with Alisa Childers
- The Pastor's Wife and Her Bible

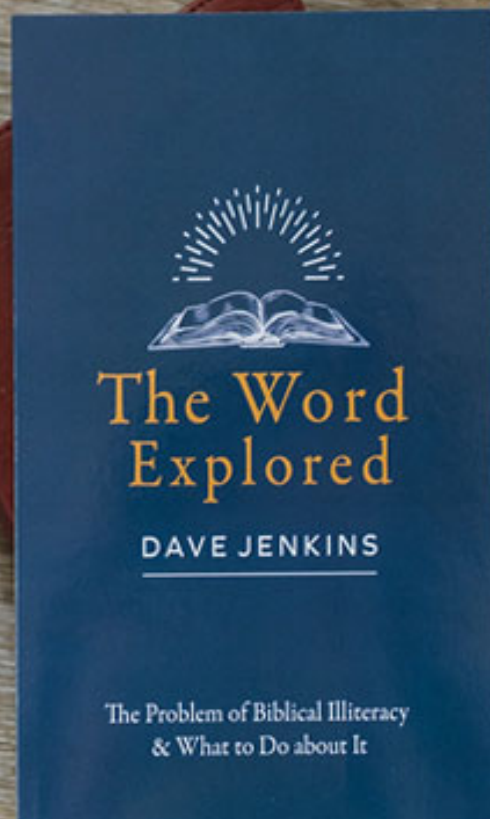


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*The Word Explored:
The Problem of
Biblical Illiteracy &
What to Do about It*
is an easy-to-read,
biblically-based work
for lay-people and
pastors alike.

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Editor's Corner

EXECUTIVE EDITOR*Dave Jenkins***CONTENT EDITOR***Sarah Jenkins***DESIGN DIRECTOR***Sarah Jenkins*

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Last summer in Southern California we had sky that was blood red from wildfires that were raging. I want you to picture with me a fireman standing near that wildfire, just watching it burn and doing nothing to stop it. Now we know that wouldn't happen, but allow me to give you this illustration. In many ways the problem of biblical illiteracy in the Church is like the fireman standing on the periphery not fighting the wildfire. The sky turns blood red and the fire continues on raging. What should we do about the problem of biblical illiteracy?

The state of the Church today is the root of the problem of biblical illiteracy. First, you had the "seeker sensitive" movement—a drive that intended to reach people and to teach Christians to engage in evangelism. That's a good thing, but what happened because of this movement was that churches began only focusing on reaching the lost at the expense of neglecting the discipleship of those who were already Christians. Because of this neglect, those Christians left the Church, because they saw no need for it. Now you have Christians who think it's normal to have "church services" at their favorite coffee shops.

Next, fast-forward to the 1990's—a new movement is developed, called the Emergent Church. The Emergent Church wanted to have a "conversation about making disciples". The problem was that their definition of "discipleship" was divorced from biblical doctrine—that is, teaching that comes from God's Word. Since God's Word (all sixty-six books of the Bible) is binding, sufficient, and for every sphere of the Christian life, there is no way that a conversation about discipleship can gain any traction apart from the Bible's teaching. So, what we witnessed was the

Emergent Church walking away from the Bible's teaching and the Bible itself.

Biblical illiteracy is not only a contemporary trend. Many people today think they know the Bible, or know facts about the Bible, and therefore consider themselves "spiritual". But the problem with this so-called "spirituality" is that they meld their ideas from other religions and lump the Bible in with them. Not to mention this concept of keeping one's faith to oneself, because "living and preaching faith publicly is not culturally acceptable".

The main problem with biblical illiteracy, then, isn't only out there in the Church, it's also out there in the world. People may know lots of Bible facts and stories, but they don't see those stories as having a unified whole in Christ, as the Bible teaches. Biblical illiteracy abounds like a wildfire raging. So, what do we do about this problem?

In this issue of *Theology for Life* we are aiming to help you to be grounded in the Bible and to have your life shaped by it so that you can be an effective servant of the Lord Jesus. See, as you'll discover in this issue of our magazine, our faith is not meant to be private, it is corporate. Corporately as God's people we are saved as a royal priesthood, a holy nation for a purpose to join together in local churches under God's Word, and under the leadership of biblically qualified male elders.

As you read this issue, it's my sincere prayer that you'll rediscover the wonder of reading the Bible. The Bible is God's love letter to us; it is how He communicates with us. If you want to hear God speak, read your Bible; if you want to hear Him speak out loud, read your Bible out loud. Therefore, I encourage you to personally dig into the Bible; to read, study, meditate, memorize, and apply the Bible to your life. Next, do this corporately with God's people on Sunday by listening to the sermon and "doing life" with the Body of Christ. I need you and you need me, and that's why we need personal and corporate Bible reading. We cannot have one without the other to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

So, as you read this issue of *Theology for Life*, I sincerely pray you'll be helped and that you'll grow as a disciple, a student of Jesus, for God's glory and the good of His people. That you will learn to serve others in love with whatever gifts, talents, and abilities God has given you.

In Christ Alone,

Dave Jenkins - Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*

What is Biblical Illiteracy and is It a Problem Within the Church?

By Dave Jenkins



One subject that isn't getting enough coverage in contemporary Christian books and Christian media is the significant issue of biblical illiteracy. Two re-

searchers who have looked into this problem in the Church, George Gallup and Jim Castelli, write, "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."

At this point, you may think both George and Jim have overstated their case, but they haven't, and it's worse than you could ever imagine. George Barna (the author of *The State of the Bible: Six Trends for 2014*) has dedicated his life to researching trends in the Church. His research

is eye-opening when he tells us the following:

- Fewer than half of all adults can name the four Gospel accounts.
- Many Christians cannot identify two or three of the disciples.
- Sixty percent (60%) of Americans cannot name five of the Ten Commandments.

“No wonder people break the Ten Commandments all the time. They don’t know what they are.” Barna comments. His statement is a sharp indictment of the problem of biblical illiteracy and ought to open our eyes. He concludes, “Increasingly, America is biblically illiterate.” Several surveys further illuminate the problem of biblical illiteracy to help us understand how real this problem is:

- Eighty-two percent (82%) of Americans believe that “God helps those who help themselves” is a Bible verse.
- Even among “born-again Christians,” eighty-one percent (81%) believe that the Bible teaches the primary purpose in life is to take care of one’s family.
- Twelve percent (12%) of adults believe that *Joan of Arc* was Noah’s wife.
- Over fifty percent (50%) of graduating high school seniors thought that Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife.

In a recent LifeWay Research study, we learned the following about the Bible reading habits among church attendees:

- 19% - Read everyday
- 26% - Read a few times a week
- 14% - Read once a week
- 22% - Read at least once a month
- 18% - Read rarely or never.

There are a couple of interesting takeaways from this study. Almost 60 percent of churchgoers open their Bibles at home during the week at least once. And for every person who is reading his/her Bible everyday (19 per-

cent), someone isn't... at all (18 percent).

In my recently published book, *The Word Explored: The Problem of Biblical Illiteracy and What to Do About It*, I aim to help the problem of biblical illiteracy by helping people learn to read the Bible personally and corporately, delighting in God who delights over His people and His Word. By helping people understand the connection between God's delight over His people and His Word, I'm aiming to help readers grab hold at the heart level of the truth of what God wants to do in their lives personally and corporately through Scripture.

"The Lord wants you to delight over what He delights over, and to love what He loves."

The Lord loves His people, His Word, and His Church. These three things are all things that the Lord delights in. Born-again Christians should delight in what God delights in, and aim the trajectory of their lives towards that goal. Therefore, Christians shouldn't view personal or corporate Bible reading as something they do to check-off their spiritual check-list, but engage in them to delight more in God and grow in Christ.

Personal Bible reading includes reading, studying, memorizing, meditating, memorizing, meditating, and applying the Word. Corporate Bible reading includes hearing Bible-based sermons on Sunday, small groups, and engaging in the local church's life under God's Word. By taking what I call a "delightful duty" approach to the Bible, what Christians do isn't to see this as another activity in their lives to engage in, but to have the right understanding of the means of grace in their lives.

The Purpose of the Means of Grace

The means of grace are those spiritual disciplines in our Christian life that have an ultimate goal, and that goal is to grow to be like Jesus. The statistics about biblical illiteracy are alarming and concerning be-

cause of what they reveal about our approach to the means of grace. Many Christians think that reading the Bible is important, and they may understand how to read the Bible. But behind the statistics is an even bigger problem: *they don't understand **why** they read the Bible.*

In Ephesians, for example, Paul lays out the *why* (what Christ has done) and then moves to the *how* (what Christ commands). The why and how is the pattern for the Christian life laid out throughout the New Testament epistles. First, Bible readers are told who Jesus is and what He has done, and then they are called to obedience to Him. The problem is we have reversed the order in Christian growth today. Instead of calling people to understand who Jesus is and what He has done, contemporary Christian literature focuses so much on *how* we are to do our lives apart from explaining *why* we are to do our lives that way.

This shows up in our Bible reading, which is what the alarming statistics mentioned in the introduction reveal to us. Christians in our local churches start off each year with a commitment to read the Bible, and that's good. But then they stop because they spend the first few months of the year reading but then get stuck. Now, I'm not talking about the help the Church should provide to Christians who get stuck with reading the Bible. I'm talking about the many Christians who get stuck and never ask for help because they are exhausted by the continual call to read their Bible apart from delight in God Himself.

I understand being exhausted by reading the Bible. I also understand, as a long-time Christian, why many Christians get exhausted by calls to read their Bible daily. And that's why I'm aiming to encourage God's people in *The Word Explored* to something greater than mere duty (that is, checking off your spiritual to-do list by reading your Bible).

The Lord wants you to delight over what He delights over, and to love what He loves. God loves His Word, His Church, and His people. The Lord wants you to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Je-

sus in the Scriptures, for the Scriptures contain the revealed Word of God and the gospel's message in Christ and Him crucified. There is no greater need that a Christian has than to engage in personal and corporate reading. But we have to understand we do so, not out of rote obedience to God, but out of delight in Him and the desire to get to know the God who has revealed Himself in the sixty-six books that constitute the Bible.

Biblical Illiteracy is a Solvable Problem

Biblical illiteracy is a big problem today, but it is completely solvable. In *The Word Explored*, what you'll find is not only more material like I've written in this article, but very practical encouragement to address some of the various struggles in your personal and corporate Bible reading. Along the way, in your reading of my book, you'll find encouragement to "do life" with the Church. See, God doesn't save us so that we can abandon the local church, but to be a part of the Church as it is the Bride of Christ.

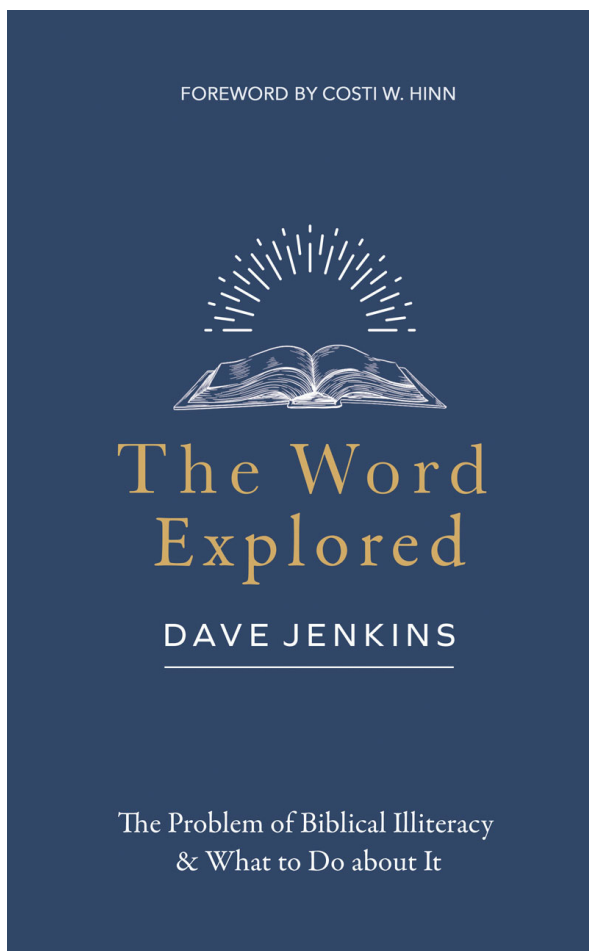
The local church is the hope of the world because Jesus bled and died for the Church. As a Christian, God calls you to do life with other Christians because He calls you to gather together with His people on the Lord's Day and then scatter for His glory to your families and vocation during the week. In the local church, we grow together with God's people to be sent out to display Christ in the world, make disciples, and witness to and for His glory.

Today I encourage you to pick up your Bible and read it along with my book, *The Word Explored*, and discover that the problem of biblical illiteracy is not one that is insurmountable, but truly solvable. Dear Christian, the problem of biblical illiteracy starts with *you*. Please grow in the grace of God and delight over His Word and in doing life with His people.

The Word Explored

An Interview with Dave Jenkins

By Sarah Jenkins



Dave Jenkins, author of *The Word Explored: The Problem of Biblical Illiteracy & What to Do about It*, is a full-time writer, editor, and speaker. He has written for many publications and is the Executive Director of **Sevants of Grace**.

Sarah: Hello, Dave. Thanks for doing this interview for *Theology for Life*! We're excited about the new book you've just had published—*The Word*

Explored. As I already know, but our readers may not yet, this book is about the problem of biblical illiteracy. This is a much-needed topic of discussion in the Church today and something that is in desperate need of change for Christians world-wide—from the Preacher in the pulpit to the average lay-person. Can you tell our audience a little bit about the reason behind writing this book and why you feel this is an important subject?

Dave: Great question, thank you. Over the years I've been in the fortunate position to lead many Bible studies, with both new and seasoned Christians. What I've observed, in particular among seasoned Christians, is that they know *the how*, meaning the basics of Bible study, but they don't know *the why*. Before I started on this book, I thought long and hard about that and came to the conclusion that it wasn't so much a "how" question, but more of a "why" when it comes to Bible study.

When I refer to "why" and "how", I'm speaking about this: the *why* is the indicative (what Christ has done) and the imperative (what Christ has commanded) is the *how*. We see this pattern throughout Paul's epistles; for example, in Ephesians 1-3 he tells us about what Christ has done (*why*) then moves to explain the *how* (what Christ commands).

To your question, I'm aiming to help Christians be properly motivated, whether they are reading, studying, meditating, or memorizing Scripture. All of this has a goal, which is to help Christians grow in Christ and to be an effective servant of God in their church and communities for His glory! Therefore, I wrote the book to address the growing problem of biblical illiteracy, but I'm also hoping that Christians will learn to *love* what God loves—His Word, His people, and His Church—and enjoy all three by delighting in engaging in each to grow to be like His Son, Jesus.

Sarah: As I read through this book, I was confronted with some very

startling statistics on biblical illiteracy. Could you share some of those statistics here and explain why these numbers are having such a negative impact on the Church Body?

Dave: Another great question! The statistics from George Barna of most concern and shockingly prevalent among people today are as follows:

- Eighty-two percent (82%) of Americans believe that “God helps those who help themselves” is a ***Bible verse***.
- Even among “born again Christians”, eighty-one percent (81%) believe that the Bible teaches the primary purpose in life is to take care of one’s family.
- Twelve percent (12%) of adults believe that Joan of Arc was Noah’s wife.

What these statistics tell us is that we have a big problem, not only with how people view salvation, but with how people view the Bible itself. Our presuppositions about the Bible affect how we approach the Bible. The Bible is the final standard for the faith and practice of God’s people, so what we believe about the Bible truly matters.

If we come to God’s Word thinking it’s only a book of fairytales, myths, and “moral stories”, then we will have a problem. We will come to Genesis to question the beginning of the Bible. If we think, for example, that the primary purpose of life is to take care of one’s family (as listed in the statistic above), then we have a flawed understanding of family. While taking care of one’s family is good and right, the primary purpose for humanity is to know, love, and serve the Lord.

You asked what the statistics reveal, and that’s a very good question. The statistics reveal that we have a discipleship problem in the Church. It’s important to not only know how to answer the question, but also *why* you came upon that answer. They also may be getting fed good theology, but they don’t know how to take that theology and apply it to their

lives.

I say that we have a discipleship problem because a disciple of Jesus is a *student*. As students of Jesus, we are to grow to be like Him. We come to know Jesus in the pages of the Scriptures, for in the sixty-six books that constitute the Bible, God has fully revealed Himself. If we don't know the Scriptures then we have a discipleship problem, because to be a disciple is to be one who learns from God's Word, from which Moses, the Prophets, Jesus, and the Apostles taught.

There can be a danger in saying what I did, because it could give the impression that we are to "master" the Scriptures. When people ask me where I went to school and what degree I earned, I tell them I have a Master's degree in the Bible. I get some interesting looks from them, but then I clarify, "Please don't worry, I don't think I've mastered the Bible!" It's said a little jokingly, but it's the truth. I'm far from it! If anyone thinks they've mastered the Bible—an inexhaustive treasure of God's Word—then he/she has a pride problem. I have a lot to learn from God's Word and need to continue to study it. The Word continues to master us, but we must be in God's Word, for that is where the Holy Spirit aims to teach us, to point us to Jesus, and to send Christians out on mission from our local churches.

Sarah: Wow, those are some alarming statistics that reveal a lot about how far we've fallen as the Body. A lot of people would point the finger at the preacher/pastor of a church as a reason for this illiteracy epidemic. And certainly, there are many church leaders at fault for not providing biblically literate teachings on a regular basis. But I get the feeling from what you've said so far (as well as within your book, specifically) that this isn't just a problem with our current pastors/preachers. Can you tell us

why it's a problem with the average pew-sitting Christian as well?

Dave: The Holy Spirit not only teaches the Christian biblical truth by pointing them to Jesus from the Word, and sending them out on mission, but gives the Church pastors/teachers (Ephesians 4:11). This is a “both/and”, and not an “either/or”. Some suggest that all we need is the Holy Spirit to teach us, but that's a mistake. The same Holy Spirit who inspired Scripture teaches us that we need teachers in our local churches to teach us the truth of Scripture and that He appoints and equips them. So, you can see there's a balance.

The primary responsibility of a pastor is to preach the Word of God and to rightly handle it. Pastors are to be models of rightly handling the Scriptures for their people. If they aren't, then that is a big problem. Pastors are to be shaped by the Word themselves so that, as they preach their sermons, they teach and live lives that are models of godly character and conduct. Our character matters to the Lord just as much as our witness.

There's often a duality in our thinking as lay-people. We often think that it's the pastor's job to “be in the Word”, but it isn't *our* job. As I mentioned in my previous answer about myself, I need to be mastered by the Word, but I'll never master the Word. As a Christian leader, I need to continue to grow in God's Word and to place myself humbly under the Word, to be instructed by it. The same is true for every Pastor and Christian leader—in fact, every Christian, period. If we fail to spend time in God's Word, we are depriving ourselves of the nourishment and sustenance that only God can provide, and thereby cutting ourselves off from the fuel that God has appointed for us to grow in Christ. The Pastor needs the Word just as much as any other Christian because they are supposed to be examples to the flock in word and in deed for God's glory.

It's not just pastors that need the Bible, I don't want to give that

impression. In my book I talk about a delightful duty. Earlier I mentioned there are three things God loves: His Word, His Church, and His people. If I say “I love you”, for example, but if I don’t put that into action, then you would be right to question my “love”. The same is true with our reading and studying of God’s Word. If we give lip service to our Bible reading, it is right for God to question our love of Him. God loves His Word, His people, and the Church. We don’t just “check off” our Bible reading (or any other activity), rather we delight in it, because we have come to understand that this is God’s Word and His Word is a light unto our path, bread of life for the daily hunger, and living water for our souls. Whether we are pastors, lay Christians, seminary students, mothers, fathers, or some other station/stage in life, we need God’s Word like we need food, water, and sleep.

Sarah: So, if the average Christian is finding Bible study difficult, what helps can be provided by their church leaders to get them headed in the right direction?

Dave: One thing that I think is helpful is for church leaders in encouraging people within their churches to read their Bibles is to exhort them to read along with the series being preached at church on Sundays. It doesn’t have to be a long reflection—maybe just five to ten minutes a day—thinking over the passages that have been (or perhaps will be) preached for that series. Sometimes life gets busy, but by reading God’s Word for five to ten minutes a day, we are spending time with the Lord. The Holy Spirit wants to take God’s Word and plant it deep in our hearts and lives, so we grow to be like Jesus.

Another thing that is helpful is to *listen* to the Bible. Each morning I start my day listening to the Bible on the YouVersion app. I find that this opens new vistas of biblical understanding for me. I may miss something in my Bible reading, but I’m not as likely to miss it while listening to it. This can be accomplished throughout the day easily: listening to it while

you cook a meal, after the kids start school (maybe on your drive home from dropping them off), or on the way home from work. Focus on being intentional in your Bible reading and find times to spend with the Lord in His Word.

Sarah: Alright, now here's a tricky question...[cringing slightly]...say that I'm an avid reader/studier of the Bible, but my *pastor* isn't...how can I encourage him to grow in his Biblical understanding and knowledge? And is there anything else I can/should do to help him or other leaders in the local church with this issue?

Dave: No Christian is above another; all are to be subject to the Word of God. That said, God does appoint pastors and elders to be overseers in the Church and of God's people in our local churches. They are to be

"Some of the best shepherding pastors I know aren't very good in the pulpit, but they are excellent in office settings..."	biblically qualified male elders. A biblically qualified elder must be able to teach, which means they have to know the Bible. Many denominations require theology tests to see if future pastors or elders are theologically ready for the office to teach God's people.
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As I mentioned earlier in this interview, Christians will never master the Word, but they should be mastered *by* the Word. And that most definitely applies to pastors. A pastor who can't teach at all shouldn't be in the office. However, it also needs to be said that teaching doesn't have to be only from the pulpit. Some of the best shepherding pastors I know aren't very good in the pulpit, but they are excellent in the office settings, doing one-on-one counseling or training in a small group setting. But, a Pastor who can't teach at all from the pulpit, or in a small group setting shouldn't be an elder. A pastor who doesn't know the Bible (or is greatly lacking in theological knowledge) cannot possibly be a pastor or an elder, nor does he meet the biblical re-

quirement to teach.

I think it's very dangerous if there is a pastor who isn't an avid reader and studier of Scripture. Scripture is to not only ground our ministries, but it is to ground our very lives. If a Pastor isn't reading God's Word, I think the elders should be involved and find out what's going on. The elders are there to care for the pastor, to help him grow, and to hold him accountable.

I think one big way lay people can encourage pastors is by giving him good theology books from publishers like Crossway. Or, even better, find out who his favorite authors are and get him more of those books. Find some Puritan-authored books as well, and give him some good historical theology. And last, but *not least*, encourage him to have time off.

Sarah: Well, thank you again for your excellent advice and thoughtful perspective on this subject, Dave. I hope we get a chance to talk to you again in the near future!

Biblical Literacy Begins in the Pew

By Lara D'Entremont

When we think of biblical literacy, many of us may picture ourselves tucked away in our home office or at our kitchen table with notebooks



and commentaries encircling us like our own little

army. Most likely it's the early hours before the sun rises or the late hours of the night after the sun has already set—to guarantee it will be quiet and we'll be alone. We have our hands cupped around a steaming hot drink and our glasses perched on the bridges of our noses. Perhaps we also plug in our earbuds to listen to worship music or a podcast.

Personal and solitary. This is what biblical literacy should look like for believers, right? But what if biblical literacy could also look like a room of diverse people sitting together, a baby or two crying in the background, music playing as a chorus of voices ring together in worship to God, feasting together for the Lord's Supper, and a man behind a pulpit expositing the Word of God? Is church a place we can grow in biblical literacy? It is, and it's not only *one* of the ways, but the *main* way God grows His children in their knowledge of Him and molds them more into His likeness.

As a mother of a busy toddler (and a soon-to-be mother of tiny twins) corporate worship often feels overwhelming. I'd much prefer to sit in the comfort of my home, where my son can be as loud as he likes, while I listen to a sermon curled up on my couch. Yet God has beckoned us to come to His house and meet together for worship and to hear Scripture preached: *"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near"* (Hebrews 10:24-25 ESV). Why is corporate worship so important to God? Why has He made this His main means of sanctifying His people?

Corporate Worship is the Primary Means of Discipleship

In the earliest days of the Church, believers didn't have the abundance of resources at their fingertips to study God's Word like we do—in fact, they probably didn't have their own copy of Scripture. The only way to hear and receive teaching on the Word was to go and hear it preached each week.

We often set up laws for ourselves of what it means to be a good Christian. We should be studying our Bibles on our own for an hour each day. We need five thick commentaries on our bookcase. We should

listen to podcasts and lectures whenever we have a free moment. And if we miss a day, we're condemned as a failure.

Yet, these aren't laws God has set up for His people. These personal laws we've written would have been impossible for the people of God to accomplish for hundreds of years. We need to recognize that God has provided corporate worship, not as a supplement, but as the main means by which His people are disciplined and thus learn about Him. As Pastor Justin Perdue has said,

"God has promised to uniquely bless corporate realities in a way that he has not promised to bless something you do in private. That does not mean that what you do in private is irrelevant...But it does mean that the most important thing by miles, when it comes to the Christian life and our growth and sustenance, is that we gather with the saints to partake of the means that God has promised to bless and to use for our growth, maturation, and sustenance."

For this reason, biblical literacy should always begin and stem from corporate worship.

Corporate Worship Provides the Sacraments

We may not view the sacraments as fundamental for our biblical literacy. We watch a baptism, we eat a piece of bread, we drink from a tiny cup, and we hear the Word expounded. It's a nice ritual, but how much is it truly contributing to our spiritual development?

As Michael Horton has noted, "For many Christians, especially evangelicals, the public means of grace (preaching, baptism, and the Lord's Supper) are 'churchy,' different from—if not antithetical to—one's private, personal, and unmediated relationship with Christ. For many of us, it's counterintuitive to speak of the Spirit's work through creaturely means." But in reality, "Faith is not something we can manufacture within ourselves; it is a gift of the Spirit, which he gives us through tan-

gible, unspectacular, earthly means: another sinner's speech in the name of Christ, water, bread, and wine. What could be more common? And yet, consecrated by God, they become his means of salvation."

These simple, earthly acts are a means of God's grace being communicated to His people. They nourish our faith. These acts, though so simple in appearance, are much greater than any time we could spend in private devotions. By them we are strengthened as we're reminded of the gospel and the application of God's grace to our wounded and sinful hearts. And by them we grow in biblical literacy.

Corporate Worship Gives Opportunity to Put Our Biblical Literacy to Work

Sunday mornings can feel like a rush through a burning building. We jump out of bed, try to get everyone dressed in unstained clothes, grab and munch breakfast as we scramble out the door, and barely make it to our seats on time for the service to start. Then when the final prayer and benediction are said, we gather our families up and hurry out the door. We might pause to check in with a fellow volunteer about next week's responsibilities, but then we run to grab lunch so we can get the children (and maybe ourselves) down for a nap at a reasonable time. Perhaps some Sundays in all this rush, our families are the only ones to whom we speak.

"Like the Psalmist, let's go to the house of the Lord with rejoicing
(Psalm 122:1)."

When we move at this pace through the church building, I wonder if we've forgotten why we even gathered. Perhaps we're no longer seeing church as a place to grow in fellowship, but rather something we should make sure gets ticked off our checklists.

However, as we meet together each Sunday, corporate worship should lend us the opportunity to put our biblical literacy to work. As we discuss life and Scripture before and afterward with our fellow church members, as we greet newcomers and let them see Christ in us, as we listen to and discern the words preached, as we worship and meditate on the verses we sing—in all of this we apply what we’re learning each Sunday and throughout our weeks in private study.

Go to His House with Rejoicing

Like the Psalmist, let’s go to the house of the Lord with rejoicing (Psalm 122:1). It’s not an interruption to what could have more time in private devotions. Rather, it’s the means by which we will grow in our biblical literacy and be able to edify others with it. “Christ delivers himself to us, gift-wrapped in the creaturely means of preaching and sacrament. In this way, the transcendent and majestic God makes himself ‘haveable.’ However, we must never forget that salvation is found in the Gift, not in the package in which it is delivered.” Let’s go to His house rejoicing, ready to receive and grow through God’s ordinary and creaturely means.

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Growing Our Longing For and Delight in God's Word

By Marissa Henley



What got you out of bed this morning? A blaring alarm clock, an enthusiastic dog, or a crying baby? Maybe you were excited to be one day closer to the weekend or your next vacation. If I'm honest, my love of coffee lures me from my bed most mornings. Sometimes I

gaze longingly at my coffeemaker in the evening and anticipate the early morning cup that I'll enjoy the next day. That warm mug in my hands, those first few sips slowly waking me up...I love coffee and never go a day without it.

I'd love to say I long for, and delight in, God's Word in the same way. Do I yearn to spend time soaking up the self-revelation of the One who made me, redeemed me, and ordained all my days? Am I so committed to knowing the will of my heavenly Father that I can't imagine a day without His Word?

If you're like me, the answers to these questions are a work in progress. Let's consider together the importance of longing for, and delighting in, God's Word as well as some practical steps to cultivate this love of Scripture.

Longing for God's Word

In Peter's first letter, he exhorts us to long for something much better than our next vacation or the perfect cup of coffee: *"Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good"* (1st Peter 2:2-3).

What is this spiritual milk we're to long for? We find some clues here in the text. First, when Peter says "spiritual", he uses the Greek word *"logikos"*. It's different from the Greek word he uses for "spiritual" two verses later when he mentions a spiritual house. And this word he uses here—*logikos*—sounds a lot like the Greek word *logos*, which means "word".

When we look at the context of this verse, we find more clues that Peter is talking about the Word of God. In 1st Peter 1:23-25, Peter refers to the *"living and abiding word of God."* He writes that the *"word of the Lord remains forever"* and *"this word is the good news that was preached to you."* As we move into chapter 2, we see that Peter is telling them to put away sinful words and long for the good news of God's Word.

In other places in Scripture, being compared to a newborn implies spiritual immaturity, but that is not the context here. Peter wants us to see ourselves as infants who are dependent on someone else to give us what we need to live and to grow. What we need is God's Word. God has given us His Word so that we might have life and nourishment from it. This is the "pure spiritual milk" Peter wants us to long for.

We need God's Word to know how we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. We also need God's Word for our daily life as God's

children. Peter says, *“Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good”* (1st Peter 2:2, emphasis added).

We feast on the truth of His promises, and as David says in Psalm 34:8, we *“taste and see that the Lord is good.”* We receive nourishment for each day from God’s Word, and that nourishment is necessary for our growth and maturity in Christ.

<p>Peter’s newborn analogy also teaches us that we need this spiritual</p> <p>“Once we long for God’s Word and make time to know it better, we also need to learn to delight in it.”</p>	<p>milk each day. We would never say about a baby, “Well, she had milk last week. She should be fine for a while without it.” Of course not! Newborns need milk several times a day. And we should view God’s Word the same way—we need it, we can’t live without it, and we need to saturate ourselves with it over and over and over again.</p>
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So How Can We Grow Our Longing for God’s Word?

One important step is to stop feeding our cravings with spiritual junk food. Junk food is easy and fun to consume, but it doesn’t ultimately satisfy us. It can leave us feeling empty, still hungry for real nourishment.

It takes effort to read, study, and meditate on God’s Word. It takes very little effort to scroll through Instagram or hit play on the next episode of our favorite show. We’re often tempted to fill our days with distraction and noise that keeps our mind busy but never gives us true rest and peace.

Next, we must fight the temptation to find our hope and peace in worldly sources that promise the information and validation we crave.

Scrolling through news headlines won't soothe our fears. Immersing ourselves in other people's lives on social media won't solve our personal struggles. When we bring our fears and our struggles to the Lord, we find hope in the promises of His Word. We are reminded that our heavenly Father is on His throne, He cares for us, and He is working all things for our good and His glory.

To help us choose spiritual milk over junk food, we need to cultivate healthy habits. Have you ever noticed that after exercising, you crave a salad or some fruit—not a cheeseburger and milkshake? In our physical lives, healthy actions grow healthy appetites. And the same is true in our spiritual lives. If we want to grow healthy appetites, we need to choose healthy actions.

The more we feast on God's Word, the more we taste His goodness, the more we will grow our appetite and longing for more of this spiritual milk. We will see more and more that His Word is more valuable than anything else this world can offer.

Once we long for God's Word and make time to know it better, we also need to learn to delight in it. Sometimes we sit down with our Bible (and, of course, a cup of coffee), and we're ready to dig in. But our time in God's Word feels empty. We're slogging through our study, but we're not seeing the growth we hoped for. Learning to delight in God's Word will help us persevere in those inevitable dry seasons.

Delighting in God's Word

I love to bore my children with stories about when I was a kid back in "the 1900s", as they would say. I explain that if you wanted to talk to your friend, first you had to wait until other people in your house were done with the phone. Then you looked up your friend's number and dialed. You might get a busy signal. You might get an answering machine. You might not hear back from them until the next day.

It never occurred to us that we were developing patience by not having smartphones that enabled us to communicate with anyone, anywhere, instantaneously. We didn't know there could possibly be another way.

Sometimes I'm tempted to approach Bible reading the same way I approach 2021-style communication. I want something quick. I want an answer to my question, a solution for my problem, or comfort for my pain. If I don't get it, my time spent in God's Word feels like it was a waste of time.

The problem isn't God's Word; the problem is my expectation of instant results. I need to approach my time in God's Word like trying to reach a friend in 1981, not 2021. I will learn to delight in God's Word when I understand that, as Jen Wilkin wrote, "Sound Bible study is rooted in a celebration of delayed gratification."

So How Can We Grow Our Delight in God's Word?

Our first step to learning to delight in God's Word is to view our study as a long-term investment, not a quick fix. We need to stop coming to God's Word hoping to leave with an answer, a feeling, or an instantaneous change in our heart, perspective, or circumstances. It would be like showing up to your first day of gardening and expecting to leave with a full-grown plant. In our gardens, as well as in our spiritual lives, growth takes time.

Maybe today we plant a seed. Tomorrow we scoop the smallest bit of soil over the seed. The fruit may take a long time to develop. But God promises that His Spirit will bear fruit in our lives. As Galatians 6:9 says, "*[I]n due season we will reap, if we do not give up.*"

Our second step to learning to delight in God's Word is to understand that it's about transformation, not information. As someone who has been studying God's Word for a long time, I often struggle not to zone

out when I reach a familiar passage. If I'm reading for information, I may not find anything new. But if I'm reading for transformation, those familiar passages are just as powerful as those I've never seen before.

God's Word isn't a textbook to teach us about God. It's living and active (Hebrews 4:12). It transforms us through teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so we are equipped for every good work (2nd Timothy 3:16-17). If, by God's grace, we are like the good soil in Jesus' parable of the sower, then God will use our time in His Word to bear fruit in a transformed heart and mind (Luke 8:15). Just like plants grow by having the same sunshine on them every day, God can use even the most well-studied passages to transform and strengthen our hearts.

Lastly, we learn to delight in God's Word when we study it in community. When I'm struggling through a dry season in my own spiritual life, I'm encouraged by the enthusiasm of other Christians. We aren't meant to walk this Christian life alone—God has given us the body of Christ. When we study the Bible with others, we benefit from all that the Lord is teaching our brothers and sisters in Christ. Our understanding is strengthened as we articulate what we're learning to others. We find accountability that will keep us coming back to the Scriptures and growing in our delight in God's Word.

The riches of the Bible are so vast, we will never mine their depths in our lifetime. As we cultivate our longing for and delight in Scripture, God will be faithful to strengthen us, stretch us, and transform us so we can bear fruit for His glory.

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The Pastor's Wife and Her Bible

By Glenna Marshall



When I was twenty-four years old, my husband of two years graduated from seminary and became the senior pastor in a rural church in Missouri. We

packed up our home in Tennessee and moved to begin a new life as a full-time ministry couple. It dawned on me about the time we crossed the Mississippi River that I would be the *pastor's wife*. I'd been so busy packing and preparing to move that I hadn't really considered what would be expected of me when we arrived at our new church. I thought about the different pastors' wives I'd known over the years and felt instinctively that I wasn't cut out for this. I had no idea what awaited me at our new church, but I felt acutely ill-prepared for what lay ahead.

I grew up in the church and enjoyed the blessing of Christian parents. I was saved at a young age. Watching my parents prioritize Bible study and prayer, I adopted similar habits in middle school. However, I lost touch with my Bible during college and early marriage. To be frank, I was simultaneously busy and lazy, prioritizing an extra hour of sleep in the morning and television at the end of a long workday over any kind of faithful Bible reading or prayer habits. I was happy, and life was full. I didn't seem to *need* much time in the Word beyond Sunday morning preaching or midweek church meetings.

That changed when we began our new posting in Missouri. We walked into a church that was eager for our arrival but broken nearly beyond repair by dissension and factions. We spent the first ten years of our ministry trying not to get fired. In addition to turmoil, there were the usual challenges of ministry that the flock brings to you for comfort or wisdom: death, illness, broken relationships, doubt, theological questions, fear, anxiety. I quickly learned that I had nothing much to offer anyone because my spiritual reserves remained depleted. I rarely filled my heart with what was true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, or praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8). I wasn't pursuing any kind of spiritual growth myself; I couldn't expect others to do what I was unwilling to do. How could I encourage our suffering church members with the comforting truths of Scripture if I had no idea what those truths were? How could I grow in godliness and extend grace when I wasn't connected to the *source* of godliness or grace?

I began reaching for my dusty Bible in desperation. I had nothing to give, but I knew Who had everything I needed. I think a lot of people assume that their pastor's wife is a theological giant with an education like her husband's. In some cases, that may be true. But, as I've had the privilege of speaking to many pastors' wives over the years, I've learned that most of us have had no training for ministry life. In fact, your pastor's wife might be exactly who I was sixteen years ago: young, inexperi-

enced, and not 100% certain she even wants to *be* a pastor's wife. She may have had no formal education or training. She may not have any regular habits of Bible reading or prayer. When she finds herself in a position that prompts others to look to her for spiritual guidance, she might find that she is as ill-equipped for the job as I was. And, aside from all the expectations (right or wrong) her church might have of her, she may sincerely struggle for spiritual health.

It took me a few years of treading water in ministry before I realized that regular Bible intake was the only thing that would sustain me through the suffering that pastoral ministry produces and the neediness it attracts. In 2nd Timothy, Paul talks about the usefulness of Scripture. *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work"* (2nd Timothy 3:16-17). More than anything in life, I want to be complete in Christ and equipped for what He has called me to do. Through Scripture, we can be taught, corrected, and trained in righteousness. God has given us the gift of His word to provide what we need in this life. The apostle Peter says that we have everything we need for *"life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire"* (2nd Peter 1:3-4).

It is through knowledge of God that we learn who He is, who we are, what He has promised and provided through Christ, and how we can be saved and sanctified. And it is through Scripture that God has chosen to reveal Himself and His plan for redemption. If we want to know Him, love Him, and obey Him, we *must* read His Word. We must become students of the Bible. Jesus said that if we love Him, we'll obey His commands, and that if we want to bear fruit, we must remain attached to the vine (John 14:15; 15:4). We cannot expect to bear fruit while severed from the vine. If

we want a life of fruitfulness and growth in Christ, we must remain connected to Christ (John 15:1-11). To remain connected to Christ, we must remain connected to His Word.

Getting Started

Though I didn't really know *how* to study my Bible, I began simply by opening and reading it. If you are intimidated by Bible study, I encourage you to begin by reading one book through, slowly and thoughtfully. Pick a Gospel—the book of John, perhaps—and read through it a couple of times over the course of a month or two. If you're a list or goal-oriented person, make it a part of your daily to-do list—not because you're trying to accomplish a goal as much as you are getting to know a person. The Bible is a book primarily about God, and when we come to it, we aren't to do so in order to earn points with God or to have a tidy checklist. We come to the Bible to be taught, corrected, and trained. We come to the Word to learn about God, to get to know the contours of His faithfulness, to see the wideness of His goodness. As we grow in knowledge of Him, we will grow in love for Him. As we study His character, He molds our hearts to look more like His. Paul says in Colossians that it is through knowledge of God that we can walk in a manner worthy of the Lord and endure with patience and joy (Colossians 1:9-12).

Going Deeper

Once you have chosen a book and have read through it a couple of times, read it again much more slowly—just a few paragraphs or a chapter per day. Ask a couple of questions of the passage to keep your heart engaged and to see the text from several different angles. I like to stretch this process out over the course of a week. Currently, I'm studying the book of Joshua. This week, I'll read Joshua 6 every day and answer a different question about the text. By the end of the week, I will have read, studied, and meditated on the passage with more depth than a simple read-through can afford. Here are some questions to consider or

begin with:

1. What does this teach me about God?
2. What does this teach me about man?
3. How does this point me to Christ or help me see the gospel?
4. How should I apply this to my life?
5. How could I summarize this text and articulate it to a friend or neighbor?

Including Others

To take things a step further, try working out this study process with a group. Perhaps there are a few women in your church or community who would enjoy meeting once a week to discuss the Bible. You might even ask some other pastors' wives! While this might feel intimidating, you can start small with one or two other women. Have everyone follow the steps suggested above and meet once a week to discuss what you've learned. I have done this for the past five years, and it has filled my heart with deep affection for the women I study with. We have learned from one another and grown together as we've examined numerous books of the Bible in an in-depth way. Learning in a group like this also provides built-in accountability. I know that every Tuesday at noon, the ladies in my study group will expect me to meet them at the local coffee shop ready to discuss the text we've all studied on our own for the past week.

If you struggle to finish projects or maintain momentum, or if you're just worried you might miss something important as you study, including others in the process can be helpful and encouraging. God has given us the Church to aid us in perseverance and to encourage us to grow in the faith. While that might feel challenging for those of us at the helm of church life, it is still possible to study and learn with those for whom God has called you to labor. You can begin praying now for

some partners to study Scripture with!

When Life Gets Hard, Press into the Word

As you begin to build your life around studying God's Word, you will encounter seasons of spiritual dryness or times of deep suffering. It happens to all of us at one time or another. Sometimes those attacks of slander or apathy can feel like they are directly from the enemy. And sometimes they are! Satan does not want you to read your Bible. He does not want you to grow in godliness. He does not want you to mature in the faith. And he'll seek to distract you or distort your goals in any way he can. When life gets hard or your ministry comes under attack, don't "take a break" from Scripture. Instead, *press in even more*. Arm yourself with truth and stand firm on the gospel. Paul paints a clear picture of spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6, showing us that the way that we stand firm through suffering or attacks is by outfitting ourselves with truth. And as Jesus plainly said, God's word is truth (John 17:17).

When I think about the women who stood beside their pastor-husbands at the churches of my childhood and college years, I now see women who weren't perfect, who struggled to love their churches, who loved the Lord but wanted to love Him more, and who learned to love His Word as a means for perseverance and growth.

Whatever the demands of church life might be, our personal growth in Christ and our perseverance hinge, in many ways, upon our commitment to Scripture. The good news is that God has given us what we need to grow and endure. His word is a veritable feast we can enjoy every single day—starting today! While growth takes time and perseverance is a long journey, God will keep His promise to finish the work He began in us. He will make us more and more like Jesus, and He will give us what we need to love and serve the members of our churches.

Studying God's Word

By T. Desmond Alexander



One of the outstanding qualities of the apostle Paul was his desire to mentor others, encouraging them to

follow his example, and boldly testify to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Among those greatly influenced by Paul was a younger man named Timothy. A close bond existed between them; they were like father and son.

“For Paul, Timothy’s faith is a testimony to the biblical literacy of his mother and grandmother.”

We see something of this in the letters that Paul wrote to Timothy, two of which are now part of the New Testament.

In the second of these letters Paul reveals that Timothy’s path to faith in Jesus Christ was heavily shaped by his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice (2nd Timothy 1:5). From early in Timothy’s

life, they profoundly influenced him as they led him to understand the teaching of Holy Scripture. For Paul, Timothy’s faith is a testimony to the biblical literacy of his mother and grandmother. There is an important lesson here for mothers everywhere.

In the light of Timothy’s upbringing, Paul writes encouraging words of instruction to him:

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2nd Timothy 3:14-17, NIV).

In reading this passage, we should not overlook the fact that when Paul refers here to the Holy Scriptures he is speaking only of the Old Testament. At the time of writing, the New Testament as we know it had yet to

be created.

Paul's remarks highlight two vitally important reasons for studying the Bible. Firstly, and of primary importance, the Holy Scriptures make us wise *"for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."* Put simply, reading the Bible enables us to come to a living knowledge of Jesus Christ. And as we grow in our appreciation of who He truly is, we discover that in Him are found all the riches of God's grace. He is the one in whom we trust for salvation. Through Him we experience God's grace. As Paul reminds Timothy, *"This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel"* (2nd Timothy 1:9-10, NIV). Through Christ we move from death to life.

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible provides an important testimony to Jesus Christ. Most obviously, the four Gospels give complementary portraits of Him, emphasizing His royal nature as the son of David (Matthew), His divine nature as the Son of God (Mark), His compassion as the Savior of the world (Luke), and His life-giving role as the Lamb of God (John). In different ways these portrayals of Jesus Christ draw on expectations that are central to the message of the Old Testament.

"What begins with Abraham is later linked to King David and his dynasty, creating the hope that one of David's descendants will establish God's kingdom on earth (cf. Psalm 72)."

Take Matthew's Gospel, for example. In the opening chapters of Genesis, God announces that one of Eve's descendants will reverse the tragic consequences of the first couple's betrayal of God (Genesis 3:15). The rest of Genesis traces a unique family line that eventually leads to Jesus Christ. God's initial pronouncement regarding the defeat of the

serpent, later revealed to be the devil/Satan (Revelation 12:9; 20:2), is reinforced and expanded by subsequent promises that are given to those who form part of the chain of ancestors leading to Jesus Christ. Near the start of this chain comes Abraham, through whom God promises to bless all the families of the Earth (Genesis 12:3). This promise is later guaranteed by an eternal covenant that centers on Abraham being the father of many nations (Genesis 17:4-6).

What begins with Abraham is later linked to King David and his dynasty, creating the hope that one of David's descendants will establish God's kingdom on earth (cf. Psalm 72). With this reading of the Old Testament in view, Matthew deliberately begins his Gospel by describing Jesus Christ as "*the son of David, the son of Abraham*" (Matthew 1:1). In like manner, the apostle Paul proclaims that the divine promises given to Abraham find their fulfilment in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:8-9, 16). The Old Testament story informs our understanding of who Jesus Christ is.

While we should never lose sight of how the whole of Scripture provides a vital testimony to Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul moves beyond this to highlight a second reason for studying the Bible. Paul notes that God deliberately inspired the writing of the Bible, in order that its contents might transform the way in which we live. He observes that "*all Scripture*" is useful for equipping "*the servant of God...for every good work*" (2nd Timothy 3:16-17).

In a rich variety of ways, the Bible impacts how we see the world around us and our place within it. Its overarching meta-narrative explains why we exist and gives guidance as to how we should live. In addition, through stories that exemplify both good and bad behavior, we are taught God's moral values. Through proverbial sayings we are exhorted to choose the way of wisdom rather than the way of folly. Through prophetic oracles we are challenged to adopt lifestyles that reflect the character of God, especially His concern for the weaker and marginalized members of society. Through the teaching of Jesus Christ, we are en-

couraged to love our neighbors as ourselves, not forgetting also to love our enemies. Through Paul's pastoral advice to fledgling Christian communities and individual believers we are instructed to nurture the wholesome fruit of the Spirit in our lives. Scripture abounds in moral instructions that equip us for good works as disciples of Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul brings together in his instructions to Timothy the inseparable themes of salvation and discipleship. The whole of Scripture is designed to teach us regarding these central themes. In writing to the believers in Ephesus, Paul highlights the close connection that exists between salvation and good works. Importantly, however, he emphasizes that we are not saved *by* good works, but saved *for* good works. He writes:

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.¹⁰ For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:8-10 NIV).

If the first reason for studying the Bible is to discover the salvation that comes to us freely through Jesus Christ, the second reason is to learn the meaning of total submission to Jesus Christ as Lord.

With good reason the German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, warned against the danger of “cheap grace”, for some believers are very willing to focus on Jesus Christ as the source of salvation, but are exceptionally reluctant to undertake the inescapable demands of discipleship. As we study the Bible, we should be constantly asking how both Testaments point us to Jesus Christ as the source of our salvation and how they instruct us to obey Him in order to do good to others. The more we marinate ourselves in the whole of Scripture, the more we will appreciate what it means for Jesus Christ to be both our Lord and our Savior.

Memorizing and Meditating on the Bible

By Ben Wilson



Next to prayer, memorizing and meditating on the Bible rank highly among the hardest spiritual disciplines. Or seemingly hard.

There are many reasons for this, but one reason is we do not understand why these are necessary for the Christian life. Is there any benefit to them? How will they strengthen your faith?

In this article, we will look at *why* we should memorize and meditate on Scripture, with some suggestions for how to practice them. We will conclude by looking at how both can help with the pervasive problem of biblical illiteracy in our world.

Memorizing the Bible

The primary reason we need to

memorize the Bible is for personal holiness. The Psalmist wrote, “*I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.*” (Psalm 119:11) Scripture memorization is essential to fight against sin and for holiness. The Psalmist stored up God’s word in his heart so he would not sin against God. The goal of every tool God gives to us is to grow in holiness. Don Whitney writes, “When Scripture is stored in the mind, it is available for the Holy Spirit to take and bring to your attention when you

need it most” (*Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life*, 42).

“...I don’t think Jesus had scrolls from the Old Testament with Him nor did He have His iPhone to pull up His favorite Bible app.”

God’s Word reveals Him to us. As we grow in our knowledge of Him so does our love and obedience. The big reason we need to memorize the Bible is to fight against sin, for obedience. I think all of us would agree one way we fight against sin is through prayer. After all, Jesus in-

structed His disciples to pray that God would deliver them from evil (Matthew 6:13). But we are not as quick to run to memorization in our pursuit of Christlikeness.

Matthew and Luke both record Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness at the outset of His ministry (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). What stands out from both accounts is Jesus’ use of Scripture. Each time Satan brings a new temptation to Christ, He responds by saying, “it is written” and then proceeded to quote Scripture.

How was Jesus able to do this? At the risk of sounding silly, I don’t think Jesus had scrolls from the Old Testament with Him nor did He have His iPhone to pull up His favorite Bible app. How did He do this then? He memorized the Scriptures. Jesus memorized the Word and used it as He battled temptation. Jesus stored up God’s Word in His heart so that He would not sin against God.

If Jesus battled temptation with Scripture that He memorized, just how important should memorization be to us? We need to memorize the

Bible to fight temptation and pursue Christlikeness.

The primary reason we need to memorize Scripture is that it supplies spiritual power to fight temptation and sin. Don Whitney gives four additional reasons and benefits for memorizing Scripture.

1. Memorization Strengthens Your Faith
2. Memorization Helps in Evangelism and Counseling
3. Memorization is a Means of God's Guidance
4. Memorization Stimulates Meditation

Memorize the Bible for your pursuit of holiness. This is the “why”, now we turn our attention to *how* we can memorize the Bible.

How do I Memorize the Bible?

Bible Memorization is just what you think it is, memorizing verses, sections, or whole books from the Bible. Many people believe memorizing Scripture is hard or they cannot memorize it. But with a little work, discipline, and, above all, the help of the Holy Spirit, you can memorize Scripture.

Many people fail to memorize Scripture because they do not have a plan. We need a plan to help our motivation to memorize Scripture. We need to pick a plan. There are different apps you can get for your phone that will help you with this. For others, the best way to memorize is to write out the verses over and over. If you are a visual learner, it may be helpful to draw pictures next to words or verses that are a clue to us what is in them.

Personally, the best way for me to memorize Scripture is to write the verse(s) on both sides of an index card. I use these cards while I walk, and I read both sides silently then I read them out loud. I do this over and over until I've memorized the passage.

The best piece of advice I can give here is you need to do this in a way that works for *you*. The way I memorize Scripture might not be the best way for you to do it. My mind works differently than yours and absorbs information differently.

One missing piece in memorizing the Bible is trying to do it alone. You might try to memorize without asking the Holy Spirit for help. But you also may try to do it without accountability. We need to have someone we trust ask us about our memorization. We should tell them the verses we memorize word-for-word. They need to be willing to encourage us to keep going and to correct us in love when we are straying. You can memorize Scripture. Develop a plan, but above all, pray for the help of the Holy Spirit.

Meditating on the Bible

Memorization is fuel for meditation. When we have memorized God's Word we can meditate anywhere, which makes it easier. Today we hear a lot about the benefits of meditation. The common cultural idea about meditation is emptying your mind. As Christians, we need to know what the Bible says about meditation.

First, "Christian meditation involves filling your mind with God and truth" (*Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life*, 47). Meditation is active, not passive. We must fill our minds with God and truth. Filling. We don't have it in our mind, we need to put it in there. The problem we have is our minds *are* empty. We need to put something into them.

Second, meditation is "deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture for the purposes of understanding, application, and prayer" (*Spiritual Disciplines*, 48). Meditation is being absorbed with God's word, the Bible. Why should you meditate? Here are three reasons why:

1. **Understanding.** As we meditate on a passage of Scripture, thinking about it, again and again, we will understand the text. Meditation is related to studying the text. They are different, but related. God wants us to think about what He has said in His word. We are to love God with our minds (Mark 12:30). Our minds should never be checked at the door when we come to Scripture. God gave us our minds to use es-

pecially to understand His word.

2. **Application.** Because meditation helps us understand Scripture, we can put it into practice. It is impossible to obey what you don't understand. It is hard to live out the truth of Scripture if you don't understand it. As my pastor says, "meditation is the bridge to application." Another way of looking at this is "the outcome of meditation should be application" (*Spiritual Disciplines*, 54). Once you understand what the text means, ask the Holy Spirit how *you* should apply it to *your* life. Examples of applications are changing your thinking to be more in line with Scripture or a change in desires and actions to pursue holiness. Rely on the Holy Spirit at every step of meditation. God is glorified when we obey His Word.
3. **Prayer.** When we understand the text, and what we should do because of it, we have content for prayer. When you meditate on a passage and apply the text to be more disciplined with your time you can turn that into your prayer. "Father, thank You for helping me understand that You care how I use my time. You want me to be self-controlled and disciplined and You've given me the Holy Spirit to do it. Thank-you for revealing that to me. Father, I need the help of Your Spirit to do this. Help me for Your glory."

The primary reason to meditate on Scripture is the same as memorization: we come to know God through His Word, which means we will reflect that in the way we live our lives.

How do I Meditate on Scripture?

At this point, you are probably wondering *how* do I meditate on Scripture? This is an activity we should be doing continuously (Psalm 1:1-3). Therefore, memorization is important, so we can meditate anywhere. Meditation is the normal practice for the Christian. This is not an activity we can do once a week and leave it until the next week. The

Psalmist said the blessed man is the one who meditates on God's law day and night.

Like memorizing the Bible, you need to have a plan to meditate. First, pick a time. When is the best time to meditate? It depends. Schedule it and plan to make it happen. Develop consistency until meditation becomes the norm. This is not an activity for Christian elites but for every Christian. Second, pick a place to meditate. Pick a place where you can be free of distractions. Put away your phone and turn off the TV or computer. Find a place to be alone. Everyone has different life circumstances so you will have to choose where works best for you.

How long should I meditate? It will vary from day-to-day. Do your best to not rush yourself. Don't put undue pressure on yourself. You are meditating to get to know your God. Meditate until the Holy Spirit reveals the truth to you from Scripture. You are meditating with the help

"Memorization and meditation will help individual Christians and churches to overcome biblical illiteracy."

of the Holy Spirit. My pastor suggests that you should meditate for as long as it takes you to understand the text, your emotions have been stirred by the text, and you've applied the text. Don't rush. Take time to savor God's truth.

Once you sit down to meditate, how do you do it? First, select a passage. This could be one verse or many. One way to select a passage is to focus on whatever stood out to you from your daily reading. Or you could select passages that deal with a temptation you are battling so you have weapons to enter that fight with.

After you've select a passage it is time to think. You can do this by repeating the verse in different ways or rewriting the passage in your own words. While you are thinking, remember to pray, pray early and often. As you repeat and rewrite and pray look for specific applications for *your* life.

The process of meditation is not hard. It becomes difficult when we try to do it exactly as someone else does. We *must* learn from others, but

you need to find what works for you. Meditation is deep thinking on God's word to apply what you understand. It will be helpful to make sure you always have a pen and a notebook to take notes to aid your thinking. The main thing is to make sure you are meditating. This is a practice you will grow in. It will be awkward at first but give yourself to it, you will not regret it. God gave us His Word so that we might know Him. Therefore, memorize it, meditate on it to know and love Him.

Addressing Biblical Illiteracy

How do these two disciplines help us to be biblically literate? Knowledge and application of Scripture are rare today. It was assumed there was a basic knowledge of the Bible but that does not exist today.

Memorization and meditation will help individual Christians and churches to overcome biblical illiteracy. As we memorize and meditate, we will know God's Word better. We will be absorbed in it. The big picture of the Bible will be clearer. Obedience will follow since we can only practice what we know of. And at the end of the day, we will be more and more biblically literate. We will know the Bible, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we will apply it.

Why should you regularly practice memorization and meditation? To be more like Jesus and to know the Bible better. What Christian does not want more of that? What step will you take today to make these priorities in your life for God's glory and your sanctification? Start memorizing and meditating today!

When Darkness Seems to Hide His Face: Applying the Word of God in Seasons of Despair

By James Forbis

I love the hymn “The Solid Rock” by Edward Mote.

It has been a battle hymn for my soul these past two years. For the past two years at times, I have battled with despair and depression. I have felt like I have been going in circles with no clear direction in the fore-



seeable future. I have felt sadness overtake me like a giant wave crashing onto the shore and felt as if I was being crushed by the weight of the world upon my shoulders. I have been in the valley of shadow of death, as the Psalmist writes, with zero paths out. It has been a difficult season. I have had to lean into the gospel more, lean into my faith in the

Lord Jesus more than ever, and consistently remind myself that when darkness seems to hide the glorious riches of Christ, I must rest all the more in the promise and reality of life everlasting with the Lord Jesus, knowing that I am a beloved child of God who has been sealed by the Holy Spirit. I have had to rest all the more in the truths in the infallible Word of God and immerse myself in the vast riches that are afforded to me there. Applying the Word of God in the season of despair that I have been living in has only reminded me of what a mercy it is to have Gods own words at my fingertips. My goal and my hope in telling you all this, dear Christian, is to pass along what I have had to be reminded of myself daily: God's truth is everlasting, encouraging, life giving, profitable for teaching and reproof, and like a soothing balm which we can apply to our lives and know peace.

In applying the Word of God to our lives, we first must receive the Word of God by faith. What I mean by this is that we must believe and trust that what the Bible says is true and that it is—most importantly—what God has said. Without this conviction, the Bible is just another book. Nothing more. Receiving, by faith, the Bible as the infallible and inerrant Word of God allows our heart, soul, and mind to be unshakingly certain that we are hearing from God Himself. To put it plainly we need to believe and know that God is speaking to us when we read the Bible. Understanding this truth is essential in applying God's Holy Word to our lives.

Secondly, we need to constantly ask God to give us understanding of what He has said. To understand Scripture requires prayer and meditation on the Word. Prayer and meditation are the conduits we have to directly commune with God and, through the Holy Spirit working in us and through us, receive understanding and enlightenment from what we are reading.

When you are praying in concert with reading the Bible, the Holy Spirit is immediately working to open up your mind to the beautiful things of God. The Psalmist gets to this point in Psalm 119:18 when he

writes *“Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law”* and earlier, in verse 15, he says, *“I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways.”* To apply the Word, we need to understand what it is God is saying to us.

More importantly though, I believe we should consume the Word of God as if our physical frame depended on it. We must devour and fill our minds with what God is saying before we can even begin to seek the Holy Spirit and God’s help in understanding it. A closed Bible gets you nowhere. It does nothing for you sitting on a bedside table or bookshelf collecting dust. The apostle Peter equated the reading of Scripture to that of drinking nourishing milk in 1st Peter 2:2, and Moses and Matthew both wrote of it as life-sustaining bread in Deuteronomy 8:3 and Matthew 4:4, respectively.

Job himself even recounted the effectiveness and sufficiency of the Word of God: *“My foot has held fast to his steps; I have kept his way and have not turned aside. I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food”* (Job 23:11-12). To apply the Word is to know what the Word says,

<p>“Many looked up to him for advice and insight into the Word of God because he knew the Word like he knew his own family.”</p>	<p>and I believe Spurgeon gets it right when he said, “A Bible that is falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn’t.” That is not to say that if you constantly and consistently read the Bible and absorb its contents you will never have a bad day or fall into moments or seasons of despair and depression, but rather, what Spurgeon is driving</p>
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<p>at is the same core message that I am today. Applying the Word of God, especially in seasons of despair, is a mark of a healthy believer and someone who unfailingly trust that what God has said is trustworthy and true, even in times or hours of desperation.</p>	
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A Christian who consumes Scripture will be able to apply it when

needed most—in times of despair, utter sadness, and depression—because he or she has a deep well of rich biblical theology, truth, and promises from God. I think about my grandfather, Norman Wisely, who always had a verse to quote or passage to retrieve and reference when troubles crept into his and my grandmother's life. He was a tremendous man of God and servant-leader in his church. Many looked up to him for advice and insight into the Word of God because he knew the Word like he knew his own family.

From the time I was a child going to spend my summers on their farm in Illinois, I can remember waking to see my grandfather pouring over his Bible at the breakfast table or in his recliner. Whether it was an illness, a financial issue, or family drama, my grandfather was always applying Bible verses and stories to ease tension, relieve fears and doubts, and remind himself and our family of God's everlasting love and faithfulness. I am sure you yourself have people like that in your own lives. People who, at the drop of a hat, can immediately use the Bible like a balm to soothe a weary heart and mind. That ability can only come through consistent Bible reading and prayer for understanding.

Finally, my dear Christian friend, at all costs we must humble ourselves, submit to the Word, and actually apply it to our lives. That seems straightforward and self-explanatory, but far too often we completely forget to apply what we have read many times and use the Word of God how He intended it to be used. We may know what the Bible says; we may believe what the Bible says; we may know that the Bible is the living and active Word of God, that is sharper than any two-edged sword, and even understand it; but if it is not even applied to our lives when we are in a desperately despairing situation, it cannot offer us any comfort whatsoever.

Therefore, cast aside any pride you may have that is holding you back, and any wrong-headed thinking causing you to believe that you are required to despair alone, with no comfort or peace in sight, and allow the Bible to wash over you like a cool refreshing fountain of spring

water. Let the Holy Spirit soothe your soul and relieve your pain. Let the Word of God shine brightly in your life and blot out the darkness that seems to never end.

Believe me, my friend, I have been there and have forgotten to let the Word break through and crush the bonds that were holding me back from joyous living in the Spirit. The Bible is a gift of grace, mercy, and love from God, who desires you to hear from Him—so use it! When you are grieving and feel distant from God, turn to Psalms 22-24 and know that He is there. When you feel the heat of the enemy's arrows of temptation, flee to the Gospels and rest in the fact that Christ will never leave you nor forsake you. Preach, my dear friend, preach the beautiful life-giving words of Ephesians 2 over and over again to yourself when Satan is crouching at your door and telling you that you are unworthy to receive the love of God.

May the words of Lamentations 3:21-33 wash over you, and may you start today applying this particular word from God to your life if, like me, you've been suffering through despair and desperation for far too long. Know that the God of the universe loves you with an everlasting love, and that joy will come in the morning, and that God's mercies are new each and every day.

***“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.***

***“The Lord is my portion,” says my soul,
“therefore I will hope in him.”***

***The Lord is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul who seeks him.***

*It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the Lord.*

*It is good for a man that he bear
the yoke in his youth.*

*Let him sit alone in silence
when it is laid on him;
let him put his mouth in the dust—
there may yet be hope;
let him give his cheek to the one who strikes,
and let him be filled with insults.*

*For the Lord will not
cast off forever,
but, though he cause grief, he will have compas-
sion
according to the abundance of his steadfast
love;
for he does not afflict from his heart
or grieve the children of men.”*

Let My People Read! Encouraging God's People to Read the Bible

By Guy Waters



The United States has never been more educated than it is

now. More people hold high school diplomas, undergraduate degrees, and graduate degrees than at any point in our nation's history. And yet, research shows a worrying trend—Americans are

spending fewer hours reading than ever before. Ed Stetzer has cited a Pew Study that “23 percent of [Americans] didn’t read a single book in [2013],” noting, “that’s three times the number who didn’t read a book in 1978.” Although we like academic credentials, we do not seem partic-

ularly interested in learning from books.

Christians are not exempt from this trend. Pastors and Christian leaders have observed a decline in Bible reading among church members. As a result, congregations are less and less acquainted with their Bibles.

Cherishing the reading of the written Word of God is part of our heritage as Protestant believers. Believers like Martin Luther and William Tyndale sacrificed time, effort, and blood to put the Bible into the hands of the people. The Protestant Reformation was a movement shaped by the reading, preaching, and application of the Bible. In the last two centuries alone, countless translators and missionaries have dedicated their lives to bring God's Word to people around the globe, and to help them understand its teachings.

But we have even higher reasons to be people of the Book. The Bible itself gives us numerous commands to read, study, meditate upon, pray through, and apply the Scripture (Psalms 19, 119). Change in the Christian life comes as the Scripture, in the hands of the Spirit, brings transformation and renewal to the mind (Romans 12:2). In light of *"the fierce wolves"* who will enter the church, and leaders who *"speak twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them,"* Paul commends the Ephesian elders *"to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified"* (Acts 20:30-32). We need the Bible, and we need to read our Bibles. It is not an overstatement to say that our spiritual lives depend upon it.

So, what are some practical steps that Christian leaders can take to promote Bible reading among those whom they serve? Rather than browbeating or shaming, how can we encourage Christians to read their Bibles regularly, thoughtfully, and enthusiastically? Let's look at five practical steps that we can take.

First, as leaders, we need to take a good look in the mirror. Are

we regularly reading and meditating upon the Bible? Our first response may be, “Of course I am! I deliver Bible lessons and sermons every week, and I study Scripture in my preparations.” We should be doing that, of course, but that is not enough. We should regularly be spending time in Scripture, quite apart from any ministry preparations that we may have. We should come to the Scripture in the same way that any other Christian should come to the Scripture—as a needy sheep who needs to hear the voice of his Shepherd, as one who hungers and needs to feed on the Bread of Life, as one who thirsts and needs to drink from Living Water. One reason that Christ puts us in the church is to provide models or examples to the flock (1st Timothy 4:12). Are we modeling—or will we model—to those whom we serve this basic, but critical, discipline of discipleship?

There are many ways to go about doing this. Twenty-five years ago, a trusted Christian friend put into my hands M’Cheyne’s annual Bible reading plan. It takes me through the Old Testament once a year, and the New Testament and the Psalms twice a year. It has me read four chapters each day. I can honestly say that I would never have disciplined myself to read Scripture with that kind of regularity. But having a schedule has made all the difference. But if a schedule like M’Cheyne’s doesn’t work for you, that is alright. There are other schedules. There are websites and apps. There are Bibles printed so that you can read them in a year. The important thing is to pick something and to stick with it. Eventually, it will become a habit, as natural to you as brewing your morning coffee or combing your hair.

And we should encourage one another to do this. Perhaps the leadership of the Church can band together to commit themselves to reading

the Bible regularly. They don't all have to be using the same plan or method. The important thing is that each of them is doing *something*. As any athlete can tell you, it is much easier to keep a consistent workout regimen when you are training with friends. Camaraderie, accountability, and encouragement—these can make the difference between a runner who starts well but gives up, and a runner who stays the course for the long haul.

Second, as we teach the Bible, we must do so in at least two ways. First, we must be teaching the Bible as it is—a story with a beginning, middle, and finish. The Bible begins with creation, reaches its climax in Christ, and comes to its glorious consummation at Christ's return. For many Christians, the Bible is a big jumble—Leviticus, Ezra, and Jude all seem to run together. Helping the Church to see how the Bible moves from promise to fulfillment, and from shadow to Christ, will not only give clarity to Christians as they read their Bibles, but it will also encourage them to read whatever part of the Bible they are reading in light of this grand unity. This is something Jesus did for his disciples (Luke 24:25-27, 44-49), and that the apostles did for the earliest Christians (1st Corinthians 10:1-13; Romans 15:4). Standing on that foundation, we have the privilege of doing the same for God's people today.

But there is another way to teach the Bible. The Bible is a systematic unity. It teaches truths about God, humanity, and salvation. For centuries (and perhaps even in the New Testament itself), the central truths of Scripture were summarized in creeds and confessions. At the time of the Reformation, pastors and churches began preparing catechisms—question and answer surveys of the system of doctrine found in Scripture. These were invaluable tools for teaching not only adults, but also children. Expositional preaching combined with catechesis helped to produce mature congregations, well-grounded in the Scripture.

Third, in public worship, we should consider reading aloud a

chapter or so of Scripture, in addition to whatever passage of Scripture we will be reading for the sermon. The Westminster Divines' "Directory for the Public Worship of God" encourages the "public reading of the Holy Scriptures" and gives good, practical counsel for doing so in congregational worship. One benefit, they note, is that it gives the church broad exposure to the whole of Scripture. It also allows the pastor or elder reading the Scripture to make a few, brief comments by way of exposition and application. Doing this helps to train the congregation to be better readers of Scripture, and parents to teach and to explain the Scripture to their own children.

Fourth, we should not be afraid to encourage people from the pulpit to read their Bibles during the week, privately and with their families. This can be done in the application portions of our sermons and lessons. It might surprise us—but shouldn't—how often the Bible calls us to read, study, meditate, talk about, and apply the contents of Scripture. Seizing these moments for application in the course of regular Bible teaching in the Church will provide natural avenues to encourage God's people to be reading Scripture through the week. And, of course, we can reinforce these exhortations and encouragements as we shepherd the flock through regular visitation.

Fifth, we must regularly pray for ourselves and for our people. Bible reading is good, but it is never an end in itself. It is possible to be voracious readers of Scripture and to be far from God. The Pharisees of Jesus's day were such people—deeply learned, outwardly pious, but inwardly rotten (Matthew 23:27). Jesus challenged the leaders of His day when He told them, "*You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life*" (John 5:39-40).

The goal of reading the Scripture is to learn of Christ and to come to Him for life. And when we have this goal before us, we have the most powerful motivation to take up the Scripture and to read it. We come to

hear—again and again—the voice of the Son, who has set us free; of the Good Shepherd, who has laid down His life for the sheep (John 8:36; 10:11-16). Let's pray earnestly—for ourselves and for others—for hearts that long more and more to hear and to learn from the Savior. Education and credentials are good things, but they pale in comparison to being with Jesus (Acts 4:13). May the contemporary Church be known not merely as those who love their Bibles, but as those who love their Bibles *because* they love Jesus.

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- iii. <https://www.mcheyne.info/calendar.pdf>.
- iv. See, representatively, the resources listed at <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/bible-reading-plans/>.
- v. So rightly, Stetzer, "Dumb and Dumber."
- vi. The whole Directory merits a close reading. For a version that is "formatted, annotated, and lightly modernized," see <http://www.onthewing.org/user/Directory%20for%20the%20Public%20Worship%20-%201645.pdf>
- vii. To this end, I have found Matthew Henry's *Commentary on the Whole Bible* to be tremendously and consistently helpful, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/>

Another Gospel? **An Interview with Alisa Childers**

By Dave Jenkins

Alisa Childers is an American singer, songwriter, and author of the book *Another Gospel? A Lifelong Christian Seeks Truth in Response to Progressive Christianity*, and the blog alisachilders.com.

T4L: Today we are interviewing Alisa Childers. Thank you very much for agreeing to do this interview with *Theology for Life Magazine*, Alisa. Can you tell us a bit about your life,



marriage, and your ministry?

Alisa: My husband and I live in the Nashville, TN area with our two kids, Dyllan (girl, 12) and Ayden (boy, 9). I have a blog, podcast, and YouTube channel where I interact with the claims of progressive Christianity and try to help Christians answer those claims from a biblical worldview.

T4L: Oh, excellent! We know you also wrote another book recently. One of the many things I appreciate about your book, *Another Gospel? A Life-long Christian Seeks Truth in Response to Progressive Christianity?* is how you approach questions and how resolved you are to dig into the Scriptures to find answers to those questions. How important is it to have the right convictions about the Bible itself in order to ask good questions of the biblical text?

Alisa: This is such a key question! What we think about the Bible will inform just about everything we come to believe about God and what it means to be a Christ-follower. If we don't have an objective source for truth to inform our Christianity, we will be left with our own thoughts, feelings, and preferences to guide us. This will inevitably leave us with a "God" who's made in our own image, and not the other way around.

T4L: For those unfamiliar with progressive Christianity, what briefly are some of the distinguishing marks of progressive theology that they should watch out for?

Alisa: Progressive Christianity is a movement happening within evangelicalism, where people are re-evaluating core essential doctrines of the faith. There is a willingness to deny that humans have a sin nature, that Jesus' death on the cross was an atoning sacrifice, and that hell is a real place. There is also a push toward LGBTQ affirmation within the church, and a general emphasis on "social justice" over the sin/redemption narrative we find in the Bible.

T4L: What do you think it looks like in our local churches for pastors

and elders to provide a safe place for questions of doubters and to engage with the intellectual side of the Christian faith?

Alisa: In today's climate, with loads of information at everyone's fingertips, it's never been more important for church leaders to provide safe places for people to bring honest questions and doubts. In many of the deconstruction stories I've listened to and read, there seems to be a common thread of having to push doubts down because there wasn't a welcoming environment within which these questions could be asked and wrestled with. If churches would equip their pastors and leaders to be able to engage these questions intellectually and emotionally, it could provide a healthy approach to discipleship that I think would have long-lasting effects on the faith of many Christians.

T4L: Can you briefly describe what deconstruction is and how you went through your own process of reconstructing your faith in Christ upon historic Christianity?

Alisa: Deconstruction is basically the process in which a Christian systematically pulls apart, analyzes, and often discards beliefs they were taught growing up in the church. After my faith was challenged as a result of a clever agnostic pastor, I went through my own deconstruction. But I was determined to discover truth. I studied apologetics, theology, church history, some philosophy, and basically anything I could get my hands on that gave evidence for or against the Christian faith. At the end of the day (and after years of studying), I was convinced that the historic gospel is true.

T4L: What advice would you give to our readers who have friends who are reading or listening to progressive Christian books or podcasts?

Alisa: My advice would be to be sure you are measuring anything a popular pastor, speaker, or blogger is saying against the Word of God. There are many materials marketed to Christians that don't reflect the Christian worldview at all. I would say that before you learn from a popular teacher, make sure you know the Bible. If you know the real thing,

you won't be tricked by a counterfeit.

T4L: Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to do this interview, Alisa!

Alisa: Thank you!

The Centrality of the Word in the Life of the Church

By Dave Jenkins



“Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching” (1st Timothy 4:13).

John Calvin is considered one of the primary influences of the Protestant Reformation. Today we cannot consider his whole life but here’s one important story from his life that highlights the central place the Word of God is to have in the local church. In 1536, John Calvin decided to move to Strasbourg, which is located in southwest Germany. However, as the war between Francis I and Charles V raged on, it prevented John Calvin from going to Strasbourg. Instead,

Calvin was forced to stay in Geneva, located in Switzerland, where he intended only to spend one night. Being in the city of Geneva, he was noticed by others as the author of his famous book, *The Institutes of Christian Religion*. One man that met him there was William Farel, a man who led the Protestant Reformation for ten years.

John Calvin began his ministry in Geneva, first as a lecturer, then as a pastor. With Farel, Calvin started the task of bringing the life and practice of the Church in Geneva into submission to the Word of God. Among the reforms Calvin brought was the exercise of church discipline at communion, which didn't sit well with the well-known citizens of Geneva, many of whom were living sinful lives. All of this led to the crisis of Easter Sunday, April 23, 1538, when Calvin refused to administer Communion to the leading people in the congregation, who were living in rebellion against God while professing faith in Christ. All of this caused tensions so great that Calvin and Farel were both forced to leave Geneva. Calvin headed to Strasbourg, where he intended to focus on his writing. Then he met Martin Bucer, who insisted on having Calvin preach the Word, which eventually resulted in him becoming the pastor of nearly five hundred Protestant refugees from France.

"While in exile in Strasbourg, Calvin was given freedom to write and he was enormously productive..."

While in exile in Strasbourg, Calvin was given freedom to write and he was enormously productive, writing his commentary on Romans and enlarging the work of his *Institutes of Christian Religion*. Even so, with Calvin's departure from Geneva, the Roman Catholic Church aimed to return to Geneva. Cardinal Jacopo Sadoletto wrote an open letter to the people, inviting them to return to Roman Catholicism after Calvin's departure. The leaders of Geneva appealed to John Calvin to respond, which he did with the reply to Sadoletto—a compelling defense of the glory of God in the gospel of grace. That response was later considered the

greatest apologetic work for the Reformation. Also, during this time, Calvin married his wife, Idelette de Bure, a widow with two children. Calvin was then called back to Geneva on September 13, 1541, and immediately resumed his exposition of Scripture—right at the verse following the last one he had covered before his exile. Such a continuation was a bold statement of what place verse-by-verse sermons would hold in his ministry.

The Need for Corporate Bible Reading of the Word of God

Calvin's example in the above anecdote is significant. He did *not* yield one inch of his convictions, and the Lord blessed his efforts, using him to write books, preach sermons, reach people all over Europe and many other parts of the world. What Calvin understood was the central place of the Word of God in the ministry of the local church.

“Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching” (1st Timothy 4:13). Paul's answer here gets to the heart of why Calvin left Geneva and why he returned. Before we dive into the passage, let's take a very brief tour of the context of 1st Timothy.

Paul opens his letter in the first two verses of chapter one with a greeting as he always gives. In 1st Timothy 1:3-11, he gives an explanation and warning against false teachers. He continues in chapter 1, verses 12-20, explaining that Jesus came to save sinners. In 1st Timothy 2:1-13, he encourages Christians to pray for government leaders and gets into critical teaching on biblical gender roles. In 1st Timothy 3, Paul explains the place of biblical elders and deacons in the local church, along with addressing behavior in the local church. In 1st Timothy 4:1-5, he identifies false teaching. And in 1st Timothy 4:6-16, the apostle explains how Timothy should be shaped by the Word and the gospel in his life and conduct.

Teaching the Bible begins with *reading* the Bible. This applies to private study, of course, but the Greek word used here for reading (*anagnōsei*) refers to the public reading of Scripture. This held a central place in early Christian worship. It was one of the practices the first Christians carried over from Jewish worship. When Jesus visited the synagogue in Nazareth, for example, he read the Isaiah scroll before he began to teach (Luke 4:16–21). By the time Paul was writing to Timothy, public readings included not only the scrolls of Moses and the Prophets, but also the letters of the apostles.

The public reading of Scripture was necessary in the early Church because books and parchments were scarce. For many Christians, public worship was the only opportunity to hear the Word of God. This is how Justin Martyr described a worship service from the second century: “On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things.”

Subsequent history shows that the work of the gospel flourishes wherever the Bible is read. This is why the disappearance of Scripture reading from some evangelical worship services is so alarming. It is good for churches to read from both the Old *and* New Testaments, and to have a reading from the Gospels, or perhaps a reading from the Psalms. However it is done, the Word of God—from the Old and New Testaments—is still to be read in all the churches.

The Scripture is not only to be read, but it is also to be explained, as it was in the days of Justin Martyr. Thus, Paul commands Timothy also to devote himself to the exhortation and teaching of the Word of God

(1st Timothy 4:13; cf. 1st Timothy 6:2). The first term the Apostle uses (*paraklēsis*) in 1st Timothy 4:13 is the word for *exhortation*. It means to encourage or to persuade, but it refers to Bible exposition, as can be seen from Paul's visit to Pisidian Antioch in Acts 13:14-15, "*On the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, 'Brothers, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.'*"

Paul proceeded to preach salvation in Jesus Christ from the Old Testament Scriptures in Acts 13:16-41. What the Bible means by a "word of exhortation" is a sermon.

The second term the apostle uses in 1st Timothy 4:13 is (*didaskalia*) is the word for teaching or instruction. Timothy was to catechize God's people in Christian doctrine.

"Romans, like all of Paul's epistles, would have been first read aloud to the Christian Church at Rome."

This may have included private instruction, but it also refers to the public explanation of apostolic teaching. Hughes Oliphant Old explains, on the basis of 1st Timothy 4:13, that "early Christian preaching had a strong didactic flavor. Preachers were supposed to move the heart and will, but they were also supposed to teach...The reading and exposition of Scripture, the admonishing of the congregation, and the teaching of the Christian way of life were all integral parts of the ministry of the Word."

Bible exposition is essential to the health of the church. Paul did not tell Timothy to replace the sermon with a drama, or to give the Ephesians five steps to a happier life. He told him to teach the Scriptures. This is because Bible exposition has always been at the heart of biblical worship, at least since the days of Ezra.

In our local churches, the Bible is to be read; then it is to be explained and applied. The systematic exposition of Scripture—also known as an "expository sermon", which makes the point of the sermon the

point of the sermon—remains the most effective means for the conversion of sinners and the growth of the people of God. It is the most effective means because it is God’s chosen means.

I’m touching here today on an important subject the centrality of the Word of God. We often like to cite Romans 12:1-2 on the subject and it says: *“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

Romans, like all of Paul’s epistles, would have first been read aloud to the Christian Church at Rome. The phrase *“transformed by the renewal of your mind”* in Romans 12:2 is not only individual but corporate, since Paul’s goal in the context of this epistle in Romans 12:1–15:13 is to give instructions on the practical outworking of the mercy of God as the people of God “do life” with one another. Corporately, through the preaching of the Word of God, the people of God are transformed by the grace of God, so they may worship Him by offering their whole lives to Him in adoration and praise.

Another reason for the public reading of Scripture is that the Bible was meant to be read aloud. Long before Scripture was spread through the written form, it was transmitted orally. The Greco-Roman culture was an oral culture, and literature in the ancient world was spoken. For example, while the New Testament epistles were written down, they would have been read aloud to the congregation and only then spread around to the other churches through the known world.

Hearing the Scriptures is different than reading it alone privately. I often listen to the Scriptures on the YouVersion app on my cell phone in the mornings while I’m getting ready for work. I find hearing the Word opens new vistas of biblical understanding for me, which helps me in my reading of the passages I’m listening to or reading that day. Hearing the Word and reading the Word are both critical, and both are equal in their importance. Hearing the Word, whether on the YouVersion app, the ESV

Bible app, or read aloud in the local church, can help the people of God to receive the His Word together. *The 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith* is right when it says, “The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God.”

Listening to Sermons in Church

Now that we have some idea of why Calvin was so committed to verse-by-verse preaching, and why it’s so central to the life and health of the local church, let’s discuss how we are to “sit under” a sermon. After all, it’s wonderful to hear the Word preached, but we need to be doers of the Word, not merely hearers.

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:

1. **Open** my Bible and follow along as the pastor preaches the Word.
2. **Listen** for critical ideas and points.
3. **Learn** to interpret the biblical text from the pastor/preacher’s example.

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, because they checked to see if what he was saying was biblical, and the Thessalonians, for how they received the Word of God.

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 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.

Listen for Key Ideas and Points

Some pastors provide an outline/notes for you to follow during the sermon. If this is the case, I encourage you to follow along with the outline (and fill it in, if applicable) as the pastor preaches. This outline is a crucial tool to help you take notes. If the pastor does not provide an outline, however, it is a good practice to create one of your own (or make basic notes) during the sermon.

While you're listening to the sermon, look for critical ideas. These may be points that the pastor brings out in his sermons, or they may be thoughts brought to mind by the Holy Spirit. These are valuable insights to write down because they may encourage you or others later in the week or further down the road.

As a Bible teacher, sometimes I'll repeat something a few times to help the listener understand how critical it is to the whole message. Those key ideas may be the ones the pastor mentions, but they may also be something else in the passage that is helpful to you. You never know when those thoughts will have an impact later on and how they can be used by the Lord to minister to others.

Learn to Interpret the Biblical Text from Your Pastor's Example

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 relevant.

As Christians, we should be known for handling the Word of God well. The faithful pastor preaches the biblical text to help people see how he got the points he did from the Scriptures under consideration. In other words, the faithful pastor exegetes the biblical text to help the people of God see what the passage teaches, by drawing it out in helpful ways so people can learn to interpret the passages themselves. The goal of verse-by-verse preaching is to help Christians love the Lord, to grow in the knowledge of the Word, and become more like Jesus by learning to discern the Word of God rightly.

Maybe you've never considered listening intentionally to a sermon or note-taking. 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 you want, whether that's on an outline provided, a notebook you bring (or other note-taking device), or just mentally (although, let that method be a last resort). As you do so, you'll find that you will remember more of the sermons you hear.

Listening well and taking quality 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, while jotting down key ideas and watching how your pastor interprets the Scripture, will help you to grow in your knowledge and application of the Bible. This will, in turn, help you to grow in the grace of God.

Practical Encouragement to Love the Lord and One Another

In 2nd John 1:4–6, the apostle writes, *“I rejoiced greatly to find some*

of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father. And now I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it.”

John’s point here is relevant to our discussion about listening to sermons because his goal is for the people of God to “*walk in the truth just as we were commanded by the Father*” so that they would love one another. The “walking in the truth” mentioned by John carries with it the command to live in a manner pleasing to the Lord. The “commandments” they have “*heard from the beginning*” must constantly steer the life of the people of God, so they are guided by—and display—the love of God. At the outset of 2nd John, he uses the word “truth” because Christians are to be in close communion with Jesus, who is the truth. Christians are to be people of the Word, and to be shaped by the Word, so they will be able to spot counterfeits and deceivers.

This week I encourage you to read, study, and apply the Bible to your life, so you can “*know the truth because the truth abides in us and will be with us forever.*” The person and work of the Lord Jesus are the foundation upon which the Christian life and ministry are to be grounded.

The content of the gospel, according to the apostle in 2nd John 1:3, is “*grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father’s Son, in truth, and love.*” One of the primary fruits of such love for the content of gospel truth is love, which is echoed by Paul and Peter, who join truth with love. By growing in love for biblical truth, every Christian will grow in love for the Lord and others around them. The goal of all this is to hunger and thirst for the righteousness, which Jesus alone provides in His finished and sufficient work. This is why Christians aren’t only concerned with listening to a sermon well, but with consistently applying their growth in the grace and

knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

As we wrap up this article, I want to exhort you with how your week should be centered on the Word and have your life pointed towards the worship of the Lord all for His glory.

- **Sunday:** Should be centered on the worship and study of God's Word.
- **Monday:** Prioritize the reading and study of God's Word. Rise early to spend time with the Lord and to spend time in prayer. See your vocation not only as a vehicle to make money, but as a means to spread the gospel and make disciples. Spend time with your family. At night, sometime before bed, review your day. See where you can grow, repent of any sin, and cast yourself upon the perfect spotless righteousness of Jesus.
- **Tuesday:** Rise again early to spend time delighting in the God who delights over you in Christ by spending time in His Word. Spend time praying for your pastor and elders and government officials. See today as an opportunity to share Christ with others. Find someone in your workplace you can encourage and invest in. Spend time tonight with family and, at some point, review the day with what you learned and where you can repent and keep short accounts before the Lord.
- **Wednesday:** Another great day to spend with the Lord in His Word and in prayer. Keep seeing your job as an opportunity to invest in others with the gospel by using your skills and talents for the glory of God. Spend time after work with your family. Review your day and repent as needed, keeping

short accounts with the Lord.

- **Thursday:** Spend time today praying for your pastor, elders, and for government officials again. Continue to use your skills at your job to point people to Jesus and to make disciples. Spend time after work with your family. Review your day and repent where necessary always keeping the goal of keeping short accounts with the Lord and others.
- **Friday:** As your work-week draws to a close, let your daily prayers focus on your co-workers and those you are discipling. And, as usual, spend time with your family. Finish off your day by reviewing everything and repenting where necessary, keeping short accounts with the Lord.
- **Saturday:** Well, we've made it through the week! Awesome! Spend time this morning with the Lord thanking Him for His help in getting you through the week. Focus your heart and mind on readying yourself for Sunday morning. Review last week's sermon and pray for your pastor's message that he'll be delivering tomorrow.

Just remember to enjoy your time in God's Word, every day.

Reference:

- i. 2 John 4.

Biblical Counseling and Biblical Literacy

By Joey Tomlinson



In Dave Jenkins' book, *The Word Explored*, he cites several alarming statistics as it relates to biblical literacy amongst Christians:

- Fewer than half of all adults can name the four Gospel accounts.
- Many Christians cannot identify two or three of the disciples.
- Sixty percent (60%) of Americans cannot name five of the Ten Commandments.
- Eighty-two percent (82%) of Americans believe that “God helps those who help themselves” is a Bible verse.
- Even among “born again Christians”, eighty-one percent (81%) believe that the Bible teaches the primary purpose in life is to take care of one’s family.
- Twelve percent (12%) of adults believe that Joan of Arc was Noah’s wife.
- Over fifty percent (50%) of graduating high school seniors thought that Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife.

As a pastor, I can sadly confirm the reality of biblical illiteracy amongst professing Christians, and my church is *not* unique. I would venture to say that biblical illiteracy amongst Christians isn’t primarily a matter of education (though that is important)—it’s deeper than that. Biblical illiteracy is a *heart* issue. The late R.C. Sproul once published a book called, *Everyone’s a Theologian*, and in it he asserts that no matter what we know, we are asserting what we believe (or do not believe!) about God and His Word. Given the statistics of biblical literacy amongst Christians, what is demonstrated even more than our lack of knowledge is our lack of interest—which is to say that we are more interested in temporal, fleeting pleasures than knowing the God we claim to love and cherish. Therefore, our theological positions are typically navigated by our apathy and emotion. Instead of informed minds and warm affections for Christ, we have ambivalence and unbridled passion. What we believe in our bones deeply influences how we behave. Therefore, biblical illiteracy is a problem. But what is a way out of this?

A Path Out of Biblical Illiteracy

Now there are several different means God has provided to remedy biblical illiteracy (and Dave Jenkins does a fantastic job at covering some in his book, *The Word Explored*); but allow me to suggest one specific approach in this short article: *biblical counseling*. Pastors should be committed to counseling the members of the Body that God has entrusted to them in their local church. Pastors that disengage from this aspect of pastoral ministry are missing out on a great opportunity and felt need in their local church. There are sermons and specific topics I've preached about from the pulpit many times, that in God's providence, a brother or sister in Christ needed applied to them in the private ministry of the Word (biblical counseling). There have been times that I've been able to help a person, by God's grace, to do the very thing God commands us to do in the book of James when he says: "²¹ *Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.*²² *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*" (James 1:21-22 NKJV). The ministry of biblical counseling (or discipleship) allows a pastor to bring God's Word to bear on individuals wrestling with various sins and sufferings on an individual basis.

Many Christians confess (as they should) the inspiration, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture, but fewer Christians see how the God-breathed Word is *sufficient*. Professing Christians who are not interested in knowing the Word are professing Christians that do not know how to apply God's Word. Now, I say *professing* because I am skeptical of any "professing Christian" that is not interested in growing in the likeness of Jesus Christ. For many in the visible Church, the problem is that they need their hearts regenerated by the Holy Spirit of God. They need to repent of their sin and trust in Christ as the sufficient Savior that He is. As Jay Adams would say, evangelism is pre-counseling.

But if we have believers in our congregation that are biblically illit-

erate and no doers of the Word, biblical counseling is a fantastic way to confront that issue. Biblical counseling certainly increases one's knowledge of the Bible, but when done properly, it puts a person in a position to submit their thinking and behavior to the revealed will of God—to become, as James says, a *doer* of the Word.

So, for pastors unfamiliar with biblical counseling, where can you begin? In recent years there have been numerous books published on the ministry of biblical counseling, but I'll recommend a few. The first is Heath Lambert's book, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling*. When I've taught biblical counseling courses, this is the book I assign to be read. In it, Lambert does an excellent job at demonstrating the theology that undergirds the ministry of biblical counseling. Secondly, I'd encourage you to read Stuart Scott's and Heath Lambert's book, *Counseling the Hard Cases*. This book demonstrates the sufficiency of God's Word when rightly administered in the counseling context. And as you personally approach this particular ministry, I would encourage you to do so in a particular way.

First, savor Christ in all His glory and splendor. The Lord that you speak of from the pulpit and counsel in the private ministry of the Word, should be your personal, lasting joy.

Second, be the chief repenter in your church. Pastors effectively lead when they demonstrate a habit of repentance. Be quick to confess your sin and to turn from it and to Jesus.

Third, remember that the Word of God really is sufficient. The Accuser, and our culture, says the contrary, but stay near the Word. Use biblical words to describe sins and sufferers, bring the gospel to bear on each particular situation you encounter.

Fourth, when you face trials of various kinds, strive to do so with humility, and an open-handedness before the Lord. Believe it or not, your congregation is watching. As you endure trials with gospel-

centered optimism, you are being a doer of the word and not just... if I may... a preacher of the word.

Fifth, strive with the sinner/sufferer in patience, love, and truthfulness as you open the Word, speak of the Word, and help the image bearer apply the Word to his or her life.

Sixth—and perhaps foundationally—*pray*. Pray without ceasing. Declare your dependance on the Lord. Pray for those the Lord has entrusted to you. Pray for understanding, discernment, ears to hear, eyes to see, and ultimately that the Lord would be glorified, and your counselee conformed more into the image of Jesus.

The ministry of biblical counseling is a ministry that I believe can confront biblical illiteracy and do so in a warm, pastoral, gospel-centered way. Pastors, please counsel your people.

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Something Wicked This Way Comes: The Dangers of a Life Lived Apart from the Bible's Influence

By Dave Scott



A life characterized by an immersion in the Bible, and a thoughtful understanding of its more than 31,000 verses, offers weighty benefits. In the 23rd

chapter of the Old Testament book that bears his name, Job declared that he treasured the words of God's mouth more than his necessary food.

God's words flawlessly represent the power to illuminate the best

path to walk through life, according to Ezra—the author of Psalm 119:105. No one should ignore Jeremiah 15:16 if any truth exists in the old saying, “You are what you eat.” The famous Berean believers, immortalized in Acts 17, are held up as examples to follow by Luke because they invested the time to search the Scriptures for truth.

Romans 10:17 describes God’s words not only as the very pathway to eternal life, but also as a way to strengthen one’s faith on this side of New Jerusalem. Hebrews 4:12 paints a vivid picture of how the Word of God changes a person forever by piercing through any present outer shells and transforming those willing to believe from the inside out. Revelation 1:3 offers blessing to anyone willing to embrace that final book of the Bible, trusting the One it reveals.

And on and on such a list could go. From beginning to end, the Bible claims to be nothing less than the recorded words of God Himself. This is done perhaps nowhere more succinctly than the Apostle Paul’s second letter to his student and friend, Timothy, who was shepherding the vital local church in Ephesus. Not only does Paul assert, in 2nd Timothy 3:16-17, that all of the Scriptures are inspired by God, but that they literally help complete a person—showing him or her what is right, what is wrong, how to get right with God, and how to stay right with Him. The Apostle’s emphasis focuses on both the nature and Source of the Scriptures, as well as the results of those who believe and apply them.

In other words, a complete, fulfilled life is not possible for those made in God’s image apart from the image-bearer gaining some understanding of, and level of intimacy with, the Creator through His words.

So, not only the weighty benefits of life are at stake, but the most important ones—the ones that make our short lives here on earth meaningful, as well as the only ones that last

“That representation [Yin and Yang] of the reality of things is nothing less than a lie from the pit of Hell.”

forever. On the flip side of the examination of the benefits of a life lived attached to the Bible dwell the just-as-weighty dangers of the biblically illiterate life.

Truth. Light. Transparency. Accessibility. Clarity. Honor. Healing. Accountability. Sacrificial Love. Life. That is one list. Now consider their opposites. Deception. Darkness. Obfuscation. Obstacles. Fog. Shame. Pain. Defiance. Self-centeredness. Death.

The former set carries one Source, connotation, and result. The latter set offers an entirely—and abruptly different—source, feeling, and outcome. The first never pretends to be the second, but the second loves to masquerade as the first, until it is forced not to.

2nd Corinthians 11:14-15 explains, “...*Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.*”

You find both the benefits and disguised dangers everywhere: homes, churches, education systems, businesses, governments, etc. Why? Because evil cannot escape God's omnipresence and the whole universe groans under sin's dark curse.

A popular example would be the visual representation of one of the primary teachings of major Eastern religions—Yin and Yang. You know the black and white swirls that are equal in intensity and volume, working together to be the whole, and neither existing purely as each has the other embedded in their cores. With Yin and Yang, neither is dominant and both are necessary for existence. That representation of the reality of things is nothing less than a lie from the pit of Hell.

Consider Biblical Christianity next to the Yin and Yang. Good and evil are not equal opposites necessary for existence to continue. In the beginning, there was God and He was good. God existed in purity, per-

fection, and trinity—not duality—and existed in that way literally forever before Genesis 1:1’s famous first three words, “In the beginning.”

The good of God is not only not dependent on the existence of evil to continue, but is dominant in every way at every turn. Evil was allowed by God, by the Source of all that is good, to not only come into existence, but to actively deceive and harm, as it is known to do. Good, though, sets the limits. In Genesis 3, God declares to Satan that he will, indeed, cause harm to the woman’s seed, but that her Seed will destroy him, and by extension, all that belongs to him. That plays out to its conclusion and God’s Genesis 3 promise is kept in Revelation 20.

“Both Cain and Able were worshipping and both holidays are celebrated, but that’s where the stories...are ripped apart.”

If Romans 10:17 is true and a faith that saves comes by hearing the Word of God, then the flipside is a lack of faith and salvation—destruction along with the dominated, defeated Satan. Any other danger I could list pales in comparison to these pil-

lars of the Bible’s metanarrative.

The difference and distance between the benefits and dangers are easily seen in the differences and distance between Cain and Abel, or Halloween and Easter, or Jesus and Satan; sometimes mistaken for the same type of thing or person, but closer inspection, light, patience, and discernment reveal them to be two very different things—an eternity apart.

Both Cain and Abel were worshipping and both holidays are celebrated, but that's where the stories, paths, substance, spirits, and final destinations are ripped apart.

Have you ever considered that Satan is far more appealing to human beings apart from the intervention of Jesus Christ, yet Satan has no idea what it means to be human? We choose to embrace the foreign, deadly S-I-N virus rather than The Great Physician. Satan chooses to

hate us, driven by jealousy, while Jesus chose to become human, forever motivated by love and compassion for us. Yet, we humans crucified Jesus because we thought He was dangerous. We were deceived.

Spiritual reality does not allow room for a fence to sit on or a neutral Switzerland to vacation in. It is not a matter of you, dear reader, needing to make a choice between believing the Bible or not believing. We all are actively and presently choosing darkness or light.

It is more a matter of recognizing that if you are not actively choosing to turn from darkness to light (evidenced by repentance, as described in Acts 3:19) that you need to be turned from darkness to light by Jesus Christ in order to receive forgiveness and eternal life instead of eternal death (Acts 26:18). That is the Gospel truth—the difference between living forever comforted or dying forever tormented.

As I mentioned above, any other danger I could list pales in comparison to an individual image-bearer of God being tormented forever, unable to die; but more temporal and, for now, more visible dangers exist. Consider the post-modern world we live in. Many of us think about what may likely lie ahead, and would nod in agreement that it seems that “something wicked this way comes,” right beside also knowing Jesus can return anytime.

The Shakespearean play Macbeth is the source of the poetic line that announces something ominous approaching. If you know the play, you know there is a monster approaching the line’s speaker, but it was a monster she helped create. Fiction mirrors reality, though, in that as our society moves toward embracing wickedness more and more, it is wise to examine ourselves, as commanded in 2nd Corinthians 13:5, to ensure we

Many of us think about what may lie ahead, and would nod in agreement that it seems that “something wicked this way comes”...

are not also enjoying the sins Jesus died to free us from, right along with the blind and lost.

So many souls worried and angry about being egregiously over-taxed and their rights oppressed by the government. So many others troubled and angry about being oppressed, or others being oppressed by groups with more money and influence than they have, or by the systems in place. It is not uncommon to hear, "This is an outrage! Where is justice?!"

"Some would say that the apostle Paul used the Roman legal system to further the Gospel."

That does sound like our world now, but that paragraph was composed describing Israel under Roman control. It was a hard place to live. God knew that, but He didn't send His Son to save anyone from one group or government taxing or oppressing any others, in Israel then or in America now.

One of the dangers of being, and remaining, ignorant of God's Word and power is that our society becomes a place characterized by twisted identity and institutions. Think about it.

We are constantly being pushed to believe that we are either oppressed or oppressor, that we are either this race or that, that we are who we say we are or even what gender we are, and that is our identity.

No one can be your judge unless you do not believe these things, then the State will judge you wrong for your disbelief. What if I know and believe the Bible—God's Word—about my identity (made in God's image), what and who is really oppressing all of us (Satan and sin), and all sorts of unpopular truths like unborn babies are living human beings, and that God designed marriage—not the State—so the State cannot change the defining characteristics of marriage? The same can be said about the New Testament church. God designed His Church, not the State, so the State cannot change the defining characteristics of

what Church is or what it can and cannot do.

That is a society fraught with many dangers and it is the society we live in. That means the further society gets away from biblical literacy, the further they get away from believing the truths that bring grace and peace. Deception and injustice will dominate that landscape. When those who are biblically literate and believing God's Word act in such a way as their understanding dictates, we should be prepared to follow Jesus' example, even to death on a cross.

John 18:36 records that Jesus told Pilate, *"My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."* Jesus expressed to His followers that they should not resist or fight the injustice that brought Jesus trouble, pain, imprisonment, and even execution. Earlier in John 18, we see Peter drawing a sword to resist, but Jesus stops him. It is difficult to imagine that scene was not in Peter's mind and heart as he wrote the words that would later be labeled 1st Peter 3:17, explaining that it is better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

Some would say that the apostle Paul used the Roman legal system to further the Gospel. Yes, he sure did. And it ultimately led to his beheading. He never resisted arrest. He made his case in the unjust and unbelieving system, but never condemned the system or society. He just submitted and accepted the dangerous consequences that system brought to those who would bow to no other than Jesus Christ, including himself.

Peter and Paul came to understand that Jesus did not come to save us from each other, or our nations from ruin, or to bring world peace, though injustice and war do grieve His heart. He came to save us from our sins. It is not that the corporate sins and systems of this world will not be overcome by His Kingdom, because they will. That story can be read in passages like Psalm 73, Daniel 2, Daniel 7, and Revelation 20-

22, but the time for that was not 2,000 years ago in Israel and it is not now in America, either.

Jesus came to save individuals from their sins. Including you. Including me. World peace and perfect justice will come later. But by then countless millions will have spent their lives pursuing justice and peace without giving much, if any, thought to needing Jesus to save them from their own sins, and the cost will be eternally horrible, and ironically, just.

Please *do* advocate for justice and kindness, between individuals and within systems, but *not* at the expense of personally knowing Jesus through His Word and loving Him by applying what He's taught, as you obey His words, as recorded in John 14:15. It is a tragic waste of time and life to pursue justice and peace without the Judge and Prince of Peace (Revelation 14:6-7; Ephesians 2:14) simply because it is not possible—not achievable—apart from Him. And to know Him, live close to Him, and be useful to Him as an evangelist to a biblically illiterate world, you need to be biblically literate.

Three Strategies for Developing Biblical Literacy

By Audrey Ramirez



Have you ever helped someone learn how to read?

It is an exciting journey, but it is a long one. A child does not wake up one morning and decide, “Today I will learn how to read.” Instead, it takes them weeks or months to develop basic phonics skills before they

even begin to sound out written words, much less sentences or paragraphs. We would never dream of saying to a three-year-old, “Why can’t you read yet? We have been working on the alphabet since last week!” We understand that it takes a lot of time, effort, and repetition, so we take things one step at a time and celebrate each little milestone along the way. Developing biblical literacy is a lot like learning how to read. It is a process. And sometimes it feels like we are doing the same thing over and over again. But, believe it or not, that is the way it should be.

The Law of Moses was the first written scripture to ever exist. When God gave this special communication to his people, he was very

clear about how they were to treat it. Deuteronomy 6:6-9 says: *“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 frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”* God wants us to take scripture seriously! The Pharisees—the Jewish religious leaders of Jesus’ day—would write the law on tiny pieces of paper and literally tie them to their foreheads or tuck them into chinks in the wall. But they missed the point. God wants His Word to be stored in our minds and *in our hearts*. This article discusses three basic ways to help us carry scripture with us wherever we go.

Make Scripture a Part of Your Daily Routine

Deuteronomy 6:6-9 makes it clear that Scripture should be woven into the fabric of our every day lives. Sadly, we humans tend to have a short memory when it comes to God’s goodness—we are so quick to forget all that He has done for us. Thus, the best way to remember is to go over the same stories again and again and again. After all, it is completely normal for a mother to sing the alphabet song hundreds of times before her child has it memorized. Psalm 1:2 tells us that the righteous person meditates on God’s word *“day and night.”* How can we follow this pattern today? A few ideas are: (1) reading the Bible right when you get up in the morning and/or right before you go to sleep at night; (2) reading the Bible before or after mealtimes; (3) having regular family devotions; (4) posting sticky notes with Bible verses on your kitchen cabinets or bathroom mirror; (5) creating art out of Bible verses; (6) and listening to the Bible in the car. Whatever strategy you choose, repetition is key! Developing one or two of these daily habits will strengthen your biblical literacy immensely.

Find a Church That Preaches the Bible

No part of the Christian walk is completely private. God created us

to learn and grow in a community in all areas of life—including biblical literacy! Ever since God gave the law for the first time, God’s people have made a habit of reading it out loud together. When they failed to do so, they forgot God, fell away from following His commands, and endured judgment as a result. Nehemiah 8:1-8 describes one instance of the law being read (remember, the books of law—the Torah—was the Israelite’s Bible). God’s people had been in captivity for seventy years as punishment for forsaking God and His Word. Finally, a small group had returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the city. They understood that knowing God’s law was crucial to their success, so they gathered together to listen. A scribe named Ezra read from the Book of the Law all morning long, and explained it so everyone could understand. *“And the ears of all the people were attentive”* (8:3).

In the New Testament, the tradition of coming together to hear and discuss the Bible continued. God’s people were not defined by ethnicity anymore. Instead, anyone who believed in Jesus was welcomed into God’s family, whether they were Jews or Gentiles. But God’s law was, and is still, of utmost importance. Acts 2:42-47 describes life in the early church. The first Christians *“devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching”* (2:42) and went to the temple *“day by day”* (2:46). Just like the Israelites in Nehemiah 8, they gathered together where the Scriptures were being read (the temple) and they listened to someone explain the Scriptures to them (the apostles). Christians of today would do well to follow in their footsteps! It is absolutely vital to find a church with pastors and teachers who read God’s Word often and let that direct their sermons.

Use Scripture to Fight Temptation

As Christians, we face temptation on a moment-by-moment basis. Our life is a journey of becoming more and more like Christ; but until we reach heaven, we will always struggle with sin. God, however, has promised never to give us a temptation that we cannot overcome—He will always provide a *“way of escape”* (1st Corinthians 10:13). And the Bible is one of the greatest weapons He has given us to combat temptation. Psalm 119:11 says, *“I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might*

not sin against you.” Biblical literacy and victory over sin are directly connected! Jesus Himself used the Bible to fight temptation when He was face to face with Satan. In fact, He quoted scripture *every single time* the devil tested Him (Matthew 4:1-11). So, when we use the Bible to help us struggle against our sins, we are in good company. As a practical example, someone who often becomes angry might memorize several verses about anger and quote them to himself/herself when he/she feels his/her temper rising. When you do this, you are turning Satan’s tactic on its head and using even temptation to increase your knowledge of God!

Conclusion: Sweeter Than Honey

The journey to biblical literacy is not a quick one. But it is not supposed to be. It is a path of discovery, just like learning to read. The more we practice, the more skillful we become. And the more skillful we become, the more we begin to love the Word and love the God who gave it to us. That, after all, is the goal of biblical literacy. We do not read the Bible merely because it is an interesting book or because it has good advice. We read it because it helps us know the One who made us; it helps us love the One who first loved us; it helps us remember and rejoice in all that God has done for us.

The Bible gives us a glimpse of God Himself! Psalm 19:7-11 is a beautiful tribute to God’s words. God’s words are perfect and sure, right and pure, clean and true, righteous and eternal. They revive us and make us wise. They give us joy and open our eyes. *“More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb...In keeping them there is great reward”* (19:10-11). The process of developing biblical literacy may be slow. But we can rejoice with every baby step forward, because every moment we spend reading the Bible is 100% worth the effort!

Recommended Reading on Biblical Illiteracy

In this issue of *Theology for Life Magazine*, we've been considering the subject of biblical illiteracy. If you've found this issue helpful and would like to study this subject further, please check out the following reading list below.

- *Taking God at His Word* by Kevin DeYoung
- *From the Mouth of God: Trusting, Reading, and Applying the Bible* by Sinclair Ferguson
- *Scripture Alone: Exploring the Bible's Accuracy, Authority and Authenticity* by James White
- *Scripture Alone* by R.C. Sproul
- *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment* by Tim Challies
- *Defining Deception* by Costi Hinn and Anthony Wood
- *Can I Know God's Will?* by R.C. Sproul
- *God's Will: Finding Guidance for Everyday Decisions* by J.I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom
- *Preaching and Preachers* by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
- *Christ-Centered Preaching* by Bryan Chapell
- *How to Preach Biblically* by John MacArthur and the Master's Seminary Faculty
- English Standard Version (ESV) Study Bible
- Reformation Study Bible
- MacArthur Study Bible

I hope you'll find these resources helpful as I have.

In Christ Alone,

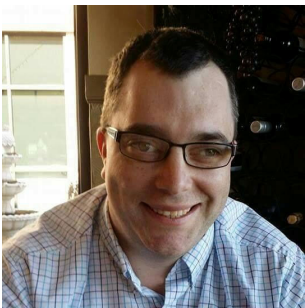
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