

## **Bible Study for January 18<sup>th</sup>**

No Spiritual Discipline is more important than the intake of God's Word. Nothing can substitute for it. There simply is no healthy Christian life apart from a diet of the milk and meat of Scripture. The reasons for this are obvious.

In the Bible God tells us about Himself, and especially about Jesus Christ, the Incarnation of God.

The Bible unfolds the Law of God to us and shows us how we've all broken it. It also reveals how Christ died as a sinless, willing Substitute for breakers of God's Law and how we must repent and believe in Him to be right with God.

In the Bible we learn the ways and will of the Lord. We find in Scripture how to live in a way that is pleasing to God as well as best and most fulfilling for ourselves.

None of this eternally essential information can be found anywhere else except the Bible. Therefore if we would know God and be Godly, we must know the Word of God – intimately.

We lament the plight of those who don't have access to the Word of God, and we should. Much sadder, however, is the condition of American believers who have the Word of God, yet don't read it!

There are three main ways we can intake the Word of God. We can receive the Word of God by *hearing*, *reading* and *studying*. Let's look at each of them.

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

The easiest of the Disciplines related to the intake of God's Word is simply *hearing* it. Why consider this a Discipline? Because if we don't discipline ourselves to hear God's Word regularly, we may only hear it accidentally, just when we feel like it, or we may never hear it at all.

Jesus once said, "But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it" (Luke 11:28). Merely listening to God-inspired words is not the point. The purpose of all methods of Bible intake is obedience to what God says and the development of Christlikeness.

One of the English Puritans, Jeremiah Burroughs, wrote the following words of counsel regarding preparation for the discipline of hearing God's Word: "First, when you come to hear the Word, if you would sanctify God's name, you must possess your souls with what it is you are going to hear. That is, what you are going to hear is the Word of God." So hearing the Word of God is not merely passive listening, it is a Discipline to be cultivated.

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

*USA Today* reported a poll that showed only 11 percent of Americans – Christians and non-Christians – read the Bible every day. More than half read it less than once a month or never at all. A survey taken less than a year earlier by the Barna Research Group among those claiming to be "born-again Christians" disclosed these disheartening numbers: Only 18 percent – less than two of every ten – read the Bible every day. Worst of all, 23 percent – almost one in four professing Christians – say they *never* read the Word of God.

Since "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:" (2 Timothy 3:16), shouldn't we read it?

**Legislators' Weekly Bible study meets each Tuesday (except following a Monday holiday) and Thursday in Capitol Annex Room 436 from 12:00-12:30 pm. It is the same study both days to allow flexibility for everyone's committee schedules.**

Jesus often asked questions about people's understanding of the Scriptures, beginning with the words, "Have you not read . . .?" He assumed that those claiming to be the people of God would have read the Word of God. When He said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4), surely He intended at the very least for us to read "every word."

How often should we read it? British preacher John Blanchard, in his book *How to Enjoy Your Bible*, writes,

Surely we only have to be realistic and honest with ourselves to know how regularly we need to turn to the Bible. How often do we face problems, temptation and pressure? *Every day!* Then how often do we need instruction, guidance and greater encouragement? *Every day!* To catch all these felt needs up into an even greater issue, how often do we need to see God's face, hear his voice, feel his touch, know his power? The answer to all these questions is the same: *every day!* As the American evangelist D.L. Moody put it, "A man can no more take in a supply of grace for the future than he can eat enough for the next six months, or take sufficient air into his lungs at one time to sustain life for a week. We must draw upon God's boundless store of grace from day to day as we need it."

Here are the three most practical suggestions for consistent success in Bible reading.

First, find the *time*. Discipline yourself to find the time. Try to make it the same time every day.

Second, find a Bible-reading plan. It's no wonder that those who simply open the Bible at random each day soon drop the discipline. You can find Bible Reading plans at Christian bookstores, in the back of some study Bibles or on the internet.

A third suggestion is to find at least one word, phrase, or verse to meditate on each time you read (We'll talk more specifically about meditation in a future week.). Take at least one thing you've read and think deeply about it for a few moments. This will help increase your insight into Scripture as well as to cause you to apply it to your life.

We should all have the passion for reading God's Word of the man who was severely injured in an explosion. His face was badly disfigured, and he lost eyesight as well as both hands. He had just become a Christian when the accident happened, and one of his great disappointments was that he could no longer read the Bible. Then he heard about a lady in England who read braille with her lips. Hoping to do the same, he sent for some books of the Bible in braille. But he discovered that the nerve endings in his lips had been too badly damaged to distinguish the characters. One day, as he brought one of the braille pages to his lips, his tongue happened to touch a few of the raised characters and he could feel them. Like a flash he thought, "I can read the Bible using my tongue." At the time Robert Sumner wrote his book containing this story, the man had read through the entire Bible four times. If he can do that, can you discipline yourself to read the Bible?

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

If reading the Bible can be compared to cruising the width of a clear, sparkling lake in a motorboat, studying the Bible is like slowly crossing that same lake in a glass-bottomed boat. The motorboat crossing provides an overview of the lake and a swift, passing view of its depths. The glass-bottomed boat of study, however, takes you beneath the surface of Scripture for an unhurried look of clarity and detail that's normally missed by those who simply read the text.

Why do so many Christians neglect the study of God's Word? R.C. Sproul said it painfully well:

Here then, is the real problem of our negligence. We fail in our duty to study God's Word not so much because it is difficult to understand, not so much because it is dull and boring, but because it is work. Our problem is not a lack of intelligence or a lack of passion. Our problem is that we are lazy.

So discipline yourself for the purpose of Godliness by committing to at least one way of improving your intake of the holy Word of God – by hearing, by reading, by studying. For those who use their Bibles little are really not much better than those who have no Bibles at all.

This study adapted from chapter two of *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald S. Whitney.