

# Psalm 19

## Why Reading the Bible is Crucial to Spiritual Health

Although many have a high view of Scripture, few have read it. Consider, for example, a recent study that found a significant number of Americans believe the “epistles” were the wives of the “apostles.” Similarly, they found a high percentage believed Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife, or claimed Hercules was their favorite Old Testament hero. Anecdotally, I can confirm the prevalence that the proverb, “Cleanliness is next to godliness” is commonly believed to be in the Bible. For the record, it is not.

Studies continue to show that the number one factor in spiritual health is reading the Bible. I suspect the reader will not find this surprising. The Bible unfolds both the will and the words of God. If we want to know our purpose in life, our reason for existence, the will of our Maker, the mission we’re called to fulfill, how to live, and what is right and wrong, there is nowhere else we should turn than the pages of Scripture.

What does God expect from us regarding his Word? First, God expects us to **Read His Word**. It should go without saying, but we often forget that reading Scripture is a requirement for believers. Scripture, after all, commands it (see Matthew 4:4; 2 Timothy 3:15; Revelation 1:3) and it is here where spiritual health begins.

Secondly, God expects us to **Hear His Word**. Christianity is a religion of revelation, not law. We believe God has stepped into human history. Therefore, we have a story to tell. To be a Christian, is to be one eager to hear God’s Word. Scripture bears testimony to this truth. Jesus stated, “...blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it” (Luke 11:28, see also Romans 10:17; 1 Timothy 4:13; John 10:37; Deuteronomy 5:1; Deuteronomy 5:27; Joshua 3:9; 1 Kings 22:19; Isaiah 1:10; Matthew 11:15; John 8:47). Americans frequently desire to hear from God but rarely crack the spine of the Bible. If we want to hear God’s voice, we must first listen to what he has said.

Thirdly, God expects us to **Meditate on His Word**. Meditation is a Spiritual Discipline in itself, yet it is worth mentioning here. Too often, our reading of Scripture is a quick flyby for the purpose of claiming we read the Bible. We would do better to feast on short portions of Scripture than to read large portions and get nothing out of it. Meditation is encouraged in the Bible itself (see Philippians 4:8; Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-3; Psalm 119:98-99). Unlike eastern religions, meditation is not the practice of emptying oneself, but filling oneself. Or, as Jesus told the Tempter, “...Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

Fourthly, God expects us to **Memorize His Word**. For many, we cringe at the idea of having to memorize verses. And this is unfortunate. David confesses, “Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You” (Psalm 119:11). How else can we speak the truth of the gospel to ourselves, to each other, or to the world around us until we are saturated with Scripture?

Fifthly, God expects us to **Apply His Word**. Merely reading doesn’t make one godly any more than reading a car manual makes one a mechanic. We must apply the gospel to our lives. This, too, is consistent with Scripture. Jesus told his disciples, “If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them” (John 13:17, see also James 1:22-25). Scripture directs us to Jesus and Jesus transforms us. Charles Spurgeon quipped, “A Bible that’s falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn’t.” If we walk away from Scripture without a greater love for Jesus and a greater hatred of sin (especially our own), then we didn’t read it right. And we would be wise to read it again.

Finally, God expects us to **Worship Jesus**. Martin Luther once noted that “the Bible is the cradle wherein Christ is laid.” Every word of Scripture directs us to Jesus, his cross, and his resurrection. This is consistent with the testimony of Scripture (see John 5:46; Luke 24:25-27). As such, Scripture should move us to worship our Savior who has redeemed us from sin, transformed us into his image, and calls us to follow him.

In both Ezra and Nehemiah, Israel is depicted as hanging on every single word the priest read from Scripture. Their eagerness to hear from God stemmed from decades of being without it. Its absence created a desire. Years ago, I read a biography of Lincoln who noted that Lincoln rarely went to church. Given his upbringing in pioneer Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois, there were few nearby. Despite the lack of corporate worship, Lincoln knew his Bible. Contrast that to the average American who enjoys churches on every corner and Bibles in abundance yet are often absent from the former and ignorant of the latter.

The primary secret to spiritual health is the Bible. We would do well to pick it up and read it.