
Summer Seminars: 1) Cherish God's Word More Deeply

Opening Prayer:

Father, you tell that we are to train ourselves "...to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come." We come before you seeking that godliness. Our prayer this morning is that by your Spirit you will teach us how we should discipline ourselves, that You might change us to be more like Christ.

WHY THE WORD?

Why is reading the Bible so important? It is so important because it informs everything else we do. It is the foundation from which flows all the other disciplines that will help us grow as disciples. The Word informs our praying, evangelism, service and stewardship.

Here are two reasons that the Bible is so crucial.

a) God gives us New Birth through Scripture.

The Bible is critical for the Christian life because scripture is the means God uses to bring about our new birth in Christ Jesus. 1 Peter 1:23 puts it like this: "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God."

Conversion always occurs in conjunction with the truth of the Scriptures being read or heard and then believed. The Gospel means good news. It's the news about what God has done for us in Christ and we learn of that news in the Scriptures. In other words, Christianity is a revealed religion.

The Bible reveals how God is perfectly holy and just. It reveals to us our sinfulness and how we deserve God's righteous judgment for our rebellion against Him. It also teaches us that God is full of mercy and compassion. We learn that we can do nothing to save ourselves, but that our only hope is to repent and trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures. And after three days, He was raised from the dead, according to the Scriptures. The Bible encourages us to come to Jesus, in whom we find life and joy and peace.

Do you see how spiritually lost and listless we would be if God had not revealed himself to us in His Word? But praise God he has given us his good and perfect Word.

b) God Sustains Us in the Christ Life Through Scripture.

Scripture is the means that God uses to sustain and nourish us in our Christian life. We see this in 1 Peter 2:2, just a few verses down from what we read just a few minutes ago. It says, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that you may grow up in your salvation."

The, "pure spiritual milk," that Peter refers to is none other than the Word of God. Just as an infant desires the milk necessary for growth, so we too should crave for a regular diet of God's Word in order to mature as Christians. Our progress in sanctification depends on our Bible consumption. The analogy of God's Word being sustaining food and drink is littered throughout Scripture.

Take Deuteronomy 8:3, "He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then fed you with manna, which neither you nor your father had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."

Or, Jeremiah 15:16, "When your words came to me, I ate them: they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, Lord God Almighty."

Just as we need a regular diet of food to keep us physically healthy, so we should also feed daily on God's Word for the sake of our spiritual health. The food we consume with our mouths satisfies us temporarily. But learning of God from His Word will satisfy us for eternity.

Does anybody have any questions?

PREPARING TO RECEIVE GOD'S WORD

What should the disposition of our hearts be towards the Scriptures, how should we prepare to receive them if we are going to truly profit from them?

a) Revere the Scriptures.

We must have reverence for the Scriptures. It is God's Word and therefore is infallible, sufficient and authoritative. We must not approach the Bible in a flippant or careless manner. Instead we ought to emulate the Christians at Thessalonica. Paul writes this about them in the book of 1 Thessalonians 2:13, "And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe."

Now, to say that we want to come to Scripture full of reverence means we come with prepared hearts no matter the occasion or the time of day. A short prayer before we start reading is a great way to cultivate this attitude, a prayer that simply thanks God for His Word, seeks the help of the Holy Spirit to give understanding and aims at making us more like Christ.

b) Humility and Dependence upon God.

We need to have humility and a sincere dependence upon God as we spend time in His Word. We need to acknowledge that we are wholly dependent upon the Lord to illuminate the Scriptures to us. We know that apart from the Holy Spirit's work in us, we cannot receive or obey God's Word. In 1 Corinthians 2:14, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."

So we go to the Scriptures prayerful and mindful of our reliance upon the Lord as we spend time in His Word. Psalm 119:18, "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law."

c) Receptive Hearts.

The third thing we need in order to profit from God's Word is a heart that is receptive to God's Word. In the parable of the sower, Jesus likened a receptive heart to good soil. When the seed of the Word is sown in such a heart, it takes root and bears fruit pleasing to God.

James exhorts us to be doers of the Word, and not only hearers. He writes this in James 1:22-25, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does."

The Bible should not only instruct our minds, but should also transform our lives. The goal of exposure to the Bible is to grow in conformity to Christ through a changed life.

HOW SHOULD WE CONSUME GOD'S WORD?

a) Hearing God's Word.

We should regularly be sitting under faithful preaching. Preaching is a means of grace ordained by God for His glory as well as for the good of His people. Throughout the Bible, God uses the public teaching of His Word to communicate His truth to His people. We see this taking place in Deuteronomy. Before Israel crosses the Jordan River to take possession of the Promised Land, Moses teaches the people about God's work of redemption in their history.

A similar event takes place toward the end of the Old Testament. Ezra and the priests appear before God's people after they return from exile in Babylon, and what do they do? It says in Nehemiah 8:8, that "They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read."

This pattern continues in the New Testament. The resurrected Christ appears to Peter and urges him to, "feed his sheep," referring to the faithful teaching of the Word for the spiritual nourishment of God's people.

Likewise 1 Timothy 4:13, Paul commands Timothy to, "devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and teaching." The Scriptures are clear that God so values the preaching of His word that He actually blesses the church with men who will do just that. These pastors and teachers are gifts to the church, given for the purpose of equipping Christians for the work of ministry and strengthening the body of Christ.

We read about this in Ephesians 4:11-13, "It was He [Jesus] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for the works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

Recognising that pastor teachers are gifts to the church will help us to listen to the teaching of the Word with hearts that are grateful to God and soft to His truth. It also encourages us to discipline ourselves to hear the Word regularly and attentively. Jesus said in Luke 11:28, "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it."

We would do well to heed these words from Jesus, so what are some of the practical ways for us to devote ourselves to hearing God's Word?

- Sunday Morning and Evening Services
- Small Groups
- Other Bible Studies
- 1 to 1 Bible reading
- Listen to sermons on the church website during the week
- Listen to an audio Bible during the week

Any Questions?

b) Reading God's Word.

In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, we find these words: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Not only are they from God himself, but the Scriptures, this verse tells us, are there to help us grow in holiness and to equip us to do good in this life. They are, in other words, sufficient for us.

Knowing the value of God's Word and the sufficiency of God's Word should motivate us to read it regularly. Jesus often asked his hearers, "Have you not read?" or "Haven't you read in the law...?" He assumed that those claiming to be the people of God would have read the Word of God.

He says to the religious leaders in Matthew 22:31-32, 'But about the resurrection of the dead – have you not read what God said to you, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob"? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.'

Jesus Himself was a diligent reader of God's Word. He knew the Scriptures well. He would often say, "It is written," to answer the questioners and accusers. We also see an example of this in the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. Three times Jesus was tempted by Satan, and three times Jesus answered, "It is written," referring to Scripture.

We should follow Jesus' example here. When temptation came, he used the Word to combat it. We need to regularly be steeping ourselves in God's Word so that when questions arise, or discouragement sets in, or sin comes knocking, or a friend comes in need of truth, or an opportunity to share the gospel presents itself, or our spirits grow weak, or the frustrations of life begin to blind us to God's promises, or we find ourselves in desperate need of grace, so that when these things happen we can meet them with the trust assurances and promises and commands and reproofs and encouragements from God's Word.

Now, if you're anything like me, you fully intend to read your Bible. You have good motives and a knowledge that you need to do it. And yet too often it doesn't happen for one reason or another. So, if Bible reading is so important how can we establish discipline and consistency in it?

Here are two suggestions:

i) Find the time.

We should discipline ourselves to set aside time every day to read God's Word. Don't leave it to chance. Be deliberate about this. Having a fixed time every day helps us to be consistent in our bible reading. Strive and struggle to build a habit of regular Bible reading and pray for God to help you to be disciplined.

If you were to read the Bible for 15 minutes each day you'd get through the entire Bible in a year.

The Bible is inexhaustible in what it has to teach us about God and ourselves and the word he's made. We are fools if we think that because we've already read through the Bible a time or two we don't need to read it anymore. We need God's Word more than we know. We should find a regular time to read it. If it's a struggle and forever illusive then we should ask people to keep us accountable and to pray for us in our struggle.

ii) Find a Reading Plan and System that works for you.

Robert Murray M'Cheyne was an early 19th century pastor here in Scotland. His legacy includes a well known scheme for daily Bible reading. In its original formulation, it takes the reader through the Old Testament once and the New Testament and Psalms twice per year. This means reading about four chapter per day, taken from different parts of the Bible. Don Carson has adapted it slightly in his two volumes *For the Love of God*.

The key with a reading plan is that you find something that forces you to read the breadth of Scripture. Be very wary of reading and devotional plans where you spend more time reading what somebody else thinks about a passage than the passage itself. A good reading plan ensures that you don't just stick to your favourite passages or to the books that you know and understand well. The ivp book *Search the Scripture* is a great book, taking you through the whole of Scripture in 3 years at a deep level and asking you questions to ensure you know what you are reading.

Questions? What Scripture reading plans do you use?

c) Studying God's Word.

The regular reading of God's Word is like riding a motor boat across a lake. It gives you a good overview of the lake and a passing view of the depths. Studying Scripture, however, takes us beneath the surface for an in-depth look at the details we would otherwise miss. Reading gives us breadth, studying gives us depth and we need both.

In Acts 17:11, we read of a group of people in the town of Berea. This is what it says about them, "Now the Bereans we of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."

Those who search the Word with eagerness have a "noble character." Are we like Bereans in this regard? Do we exercise our hearts and minds to ponder Scripture? Are we careful to examine all things in the light of God's Word?

God is pleased when we delight in His Word and when we have a fervent desire to study it. As Christians, we should be characterised by a love for God's Word. Is our zeal for the Word flagging? Ask God to revive our hearts to love His Word. He is the one who enable us to exclaim, like the Psalmist, "Oh how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long!" (Psalm 119:97)

5 Helpful Questions to always ask in Bible Study:

1. What does the text say?

- Make careful observations of the text
- Notice details

2. What does the text mean?

- Identify the genre of writing
- Understand the historical, cultural, and literary background
- Unpack the passage's syntax
- Outline the passage

- Understand what the words mean in context
- Pay attention to the context
- Locate the text in redemptive history
- Understand the text in light of the whole Bible
- Discern how the passage points us to Christ (eg. direct reference, type, predictive, preparatory, reflective—God’s nature / human nature, resultant)
- Use tools: study Bibles, commentaries, dictionaries / lexicons, concordances, etc.

3. What concerns caused the text to be written?

- Grasp the main message of a biblical passage

4. What do I share in common with the original audience or human author of the text?

- Understanding ourselves in light of Scripture
- Distil the timeless principles from the text
- Understand what the text teaches about God’s character and purposes, mankind, Christ, our response to Christ, our obedience, the church, the world, etc.

5. How should I now respond to the truths of the text?

- What, specifically, does God require of me?
- Where, i.e. in what specific situations, do I need to apply the truths of the text?
- How does the text encourage me to obey God?
- How does God enable me to respond to the truths of the text?
- How can I spur others on to respond to the truths of the text?

MEMORISING GOD’S WORD

We have to begin by acknowledging that *Memorisation is work – it takes time and consistency*. To many Christians, Scripture Memorisation seems about as fun as falling down a flight of stairs. Memorising Scripture often seems mundane if we approach it as a boring task of little value.

We make excuses. How about this one: “I don’t have the time!” Well, life is busy, but... doesn’t it really often boil down to setting the right priorities and being diligent?

Or how about this one: “I’m no good at memorisation.” Well, what if someone offered you £500 for each verse you recited next Sunday? How many would you learn? Now, that’s not a good motivation to memorize Scripture. But the point is this – you’ll be motivated if you see the benefits. So, what are some of the benefits of Scripture Memorisation?

a) Why Do It?

i. Memorization Supplies Spiritual Power

Psalm 119:11

‘I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.’

Memorized Scripture helps us in our time of need, often making the difference between falling into temptation and standing in obedience.

1 Corinthians 10:13

'God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.'

Sometimes, that way of escape God promises will be through memorized Scripture that comes to mind and fends off temptation. The way out of temptation isn't necessarily an action or a magical doorway that appears out of nowhere, but it may be bearing a trial with contentment in your heart. It may be carrying joy that is fuelled by the promise that God has saved you through the cross, that He promises to make all things right in the end, and that He promises to be our Father.

Mark 14:72

Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him. . . And he broke down and wept.

Remembering the words of Christ brought Peter to repentance and aided his turning back toward faithfulness. God's Word in Scripture, memorized, can do the same for us when we struggle with unbelief.

ii. Memorization Strengthens Faith

Proverbs 22:17-19

Pay attention and listen to the sayings of the wise;
apply your heart to what I teach,
for it is pleasing when you keep them in your heart
and have all of them ready on your lips.
So that your trust may be in the LORD,
I teach you today, even you.

Learning God's Word grows our trust in Him. Memorisation repeatedly reinforces the truth, and will grow our trust in Him even more abundantly.

iii. Memorization Equips Us for Witnessing and Counseling

Proverbs 25:11

A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.

Proverbs 27:17

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

You have great potential for good when you speak into someone's life with the authority of God's Word. If the Lord should open doors, you'll be prepared to faithfully preach the gospel to the lost, or to speak appropriately and helpfully into the lives of fellow believers.

When we do this we are fulfilling the work of the ministry. If we are equipped to proclaim the gospel to nonbelievers and give gospel-centred counsel to believers it is surely a sign that God is growing us in spiritually (Eph. 4:12).

iv. Memorization is a Means of God's Guidance

Psalm 119:24

Your statutes are my delight; they are my counsellors.

Christians cannot accomplish any of their tasks in life without God's guidance. Memorisation keeps God's words at the ready to lighten dark paths when faced with situations where discernment is needed.

5. Memorization Stimulates Meditation

Carrying a pocket Bible is helpful for all the above tasks, but as many of these Scriptures have testified, carrying the Bible in your heart and mind is even more powerful. This is especially true of meditation – you can think deeply on God's Word anywhere, anytime. More on meditation coming up!

b) How To Do It? Methods

i. Decide You Can.

We have shown that the "no time" and "I can't" excuses aren't good ones. The question that we must answer is, *will* we do it? All that we need is an understanding of the power of God's Word and a desire to know Him better.

Don Whitney tells a story of Dawson Trotman, founder of the Christian organization the Navigators, who was a truck driver for a lumberyard when he was converted. He worked to memorise one verse per day as he drove around town. During the first three years of his Christian life he memorised one thousand verses. That's more than 300 per year. We can do it!

ii. Have a Plan.

We can memorise by topic, such as faith or stewardship. We can memorise by passage. Even better, as we study a particular book, memorising key verses will help us to gain a better overall understanding of the author's intent in writing the book, even enabling us to mentally outline the book.

iii. Write (or Type) Out the Verses

Taking the time to copy down a verse helps us to slow down and consider what it is saying. This increases our ability to recall the verse as well.

iv. Draw Picture Reminders

For Galatians 5:22 (the fruit of the spirit), you could draw an apple. For Psalm 119:11, "I have hidden your word in my heart..." you could draw a Bible inside a heart. These mnemonic devices really do work!

v. Memorize the Whole Verse, Word-Perfectly

Don't miss opportunities to share your faith or participate in prayer because of a fear of misquoting a verse. And, knowing a verse word-for-word will help keep us from misinterpreting or misapplying Scripture.

vi. Find a method of accountability

Help each other out! Commit to memorizing text with other Christians. You can repeat them to your small group or with your spouse. This can be encouraging to everyone involved!

vii. Review every day

Memorised Scripture is like most things stored in our memories – you might have known a verse last year, but you will lose it without repetition. Use it or lose it.

8. Sing Songs

Make up or find Bible songs to memorise Scripture.

So, the goal of Memorisation is godliness. Memorize the Word to transform your mind (Rom. 12:1-2). Make the effort – God’s Word promises you’ll see the tremendous spiritual fruit God will bear through it.

QUESTIONS

CONCLUSION

Our growth in godliness depends on our Bible intake. God sanctifies us through His Word. Jesus, when praying for all who belong to Him, said: “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17)

The Welsh pastor Geoffrey Thomas leaves us with some wisdom on how to approach Bible intake:

"Do not expect to master the Bible in a day, or a month, or a year. Rather expect often to be puzzled by its contents. It is not all equally clear. Great men of God often feel like absolute novices when they read the Word. The apostle Peter said that there were some things hard to understand in the epistles of Paul (2 Peter 3:16). I am glad he wrote those words because I have felt that often.

So do not expect always to get an emotional charge or a feeling of quiet peace when you read the Bible. By the grace of God you may expect that to be a frequent experience, but often you will get no emotional response at all. Let the Word break over your heart and mind again and again as the years go by, and imperceptibly there will come great changes in your attitude and outlook and conduct. You will probably be the last to recognize these. Often you will feel very, very small, because increasingly the God of the Bible will become wonderfully great."