

**Spiritual Disciplines: Study of the Word** bible-sermons.org January 13, 2013

Prayer without study of the Word is like a sports car without a roadmap. Study of the Word without prayer is like roadmap without the car. Study of the Word will lead you to prayer. A prayer life will give you a hunger for the Word. Prayer without the Word is dangerous in that it has no boundaries to guard against our evil hearts. (Jeremiah 17:9) The Word without prayer is dangerous in that it is so easily turned into legalism.

**Commented [notes1]: Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)**  
<sup>9</sup> The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

These two disciplines are the most important and should be the ones that are most consistently practiced as a part of daily life. *"No one loves the Bible who does not love to pray. No one loves to pray who does not delight in the Law of the Lord... No two things are more essential to a spirit-filled life than Bible reading and secret prayer."* These two will lead you into the other disciplines, sometimes emphasizing one and at other times another.

**Commented [notes2]:** E.M. Bounds, The Necessity of Prayer, p.74

*<sup>15</sup> Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.* 2 Timothy 2:15 (ESV) Paul was exhorting his young disciple Timothy to make his greatest effort to be pleasing to God, a servant in whom there is nothing found for which to be ashamed. Then Paul gave one description of what that looked like, *rightly handling the word of truth*. If we want to be unashamed as a worker for the Lord, if we want God's approval of our life, we need to be diligent in our study of God's Word. Mishandling the Word has resulted in the abundance of false teaching we see in the church today. The lack of this discipline among church members has allowed them to prosper.

Do not think that you can spend your 5 or 20 or 60 minutes reading the Bible each day and that the exercise alone will bring satisfaction to God. Jesus told the religious leaders of His day that their problem was that they did not know the Scriptures, though they had most of it memorized. (Matthew 22:29) The spiritual disciplines are not exercises we perform that earn us favor with God. They are exercises we faithfully practice because we desire to draw closer to God, to know His will, and be more like Him. (1Peter 1:15) The fruit that comes from the intimacy that is developed during that investment of time in His Word is what pleases God.

**Commented [notes3]: Matthew 22:29 (ESV)**  
<sup>29</sup> But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.

**Commented [notes4]: 1 Peter 1:15 (ESV)**  
<sup>15</sup> but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,

Notice that in the above passage, **it is rightly handling the word of truth that wins God's approval**. In other words, it is not the study alone, but the understanding that comes from it that is evident when we accurately apply or expound on the Scriptures. (Titus 1:9) I've always been amazed how easily a verse can be pulled from its context and become popularly used in a way the author never intended. Without our own study of the Word, we can so easily be led by others to mishandle the word of truth. (Acts

**Commented [notes5]: Titus 1:9 (ESV)**  
<sup>9</sup> He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

17:11) The implication in this verse is that we would then be ashamed and not be approved by God. It is a warning the church desperately needs to hear today.

The Word of God is His revelation of Himself to us. It is the baseline of all truth. The Bible is so wonderfully unique. It was written over 1600 years by 40 different authors from every walk of life, from farmers, to fishermen, to kings. Peter tells us that it is inspired by God. (2Peter 1:21) It did not just originate in the will of men, but rather the Holy Spirit carried the authors along as they wrote.

It is at once simple and easy to understand and yet incredibly deep and mysterious. (2Peter 3:16) You can read it every day of your life and yet discover new insights each time. It is powerful and surgical in its effect on our soul and thought life. (Hebrews 4:12) It contains the history of creation, the fall of man, the covenants of God with man, the history of Israel, the promises of the coming Savior to restore us from the fall, the life, death, and resurrection of the Savior, the early history of the church, the foundational beliefs of the church, and the prophecies of what is yet to come. It has transformed civilization and been the basis for the laws of man that govern civilized society.

My wife and I recently watched a special on Indonesia. They showed the happy natives of Papua New Guinea and told how they had once been warring cannibals that almost fought to extinction but said "outside influences" had changed them into the happy peaceful people they are today. The show neglected to mention the outside influence was the Word of God through missionaries, some of whom sacrificed their lives.

We are told that hearing the Word builds our faith (Romans 10:17), that reading it brings a blessing, and as we receive its words we receive light and understanding. (Psalm 119:130) But the greatest reason for us to commit to reading the Word is that Jesus did. He taught from it. He quoted it. It was His source and proof that His answers were truth. The root of all the spiritual practices is that Jesus demonstrated for us the way to live. Beware of any pattern for life that you can't find in the life of Jesus! We saw that prayer was essential to Jesus' life. Today, let us see how essential the Word of God was to Jesus' life and therefore to our own spiritual life as well. (Matthew 11:29)

John tells us that Jesus is the Word incarnated. (John 1:14) That means that He is the Word of God in a body. Everything He did conformed to the true spirit of the Word. His birth, life, death and resurrection fulfilled hundreds of prophetic promises. But it was also the source of His teaching. When tempted by Satan, Jesus resisted with quotations from Deuteronomy. (Luke 4:4) His first message was the same as that of the prophets, <sup>17b</sup> ... "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matthew 4:17 (ESV) (Ezekiel 18:30) The beatitudes come mostly from Isaiah and the Psalms. He taught that every word of the Law and the prophets would be fulfilled. (Matthew 5:18) He warned that if we relaxed the commandments and taught that to others we would be least in the

**Commented [notes6]: Acts 17:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

**Commented [notes7]: 2 Peter 1:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

**Commented [notes8]: 2 Peter 3:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

**Commented [notes9]: Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

**Commented [notes10]: Romans 10:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

**Commented [notes11]: Psalm 119:130 (ESV)**

<sup>130</sup> The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.

**Commented [notes12]: Matthew 11:29 (ESV)**

<sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

**Commented [notes13]: John 1:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

**Commented [notes14]: Luke 4:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'"

**Commented [notes15]: Ezekiel 18:30 (ESV)**

<sup>30</sup> "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin.

**Commented [notes16]: Matthew 5:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

kingdom. (Matthew 5:19) Even when He cited the Law and then made it more difficult by giving the spiritual meaning, He was expounding the deeper meaning that was hinted at in the writings and prophets.

I have often heard people say that Jesus' use of Father when referring to God was unique. However, we find that it comes right out of the Old Testament. (Isaiah 64:8) He summed up the Law and the Prophets in the Golden Rule. (Matthew 7:12) When asked about grounds for divorce Jesus quoted from the second chapter of Genesis. (Matthew 19:5) When heading to the cross He quoted a warning from the prophets. (Luke 13:33) When interrogated He quoted the Psalms. (Matthew 26:64) Even on the cross Jesus began quoting from the Psalm that predicted the crucifixion, <sup>1</sup> *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* Psalm 22:1a (ESV)

If Jesus lived and spoke the Word of God recorded in Scripture, how much more do we need the strength, guidance, counsel, and wisdom the Word of God contains? If Jesus answered with quotations from the Word, would it not be wise for us to do the same? If our goal is to be like Christ (Romans 8:29), then shouldn't we be following His example in knowing and speaking the Word of God? How much do we desire to be like Him?

Someone has said that if at the same time we blew the dust off all the Bibles that sit on shelves in America we would create the greatest dust storm the world has ever seen.

What is happening to our culture is lack of understanding and acceptance of the Word of God. Our institutions of higher learning that once existed to train people to understand and expound on the Word of God have now developed pat responses to deny the truth of it. Those answers intentionally reject all evidence that contradicts their predetermined conclusions. They know the Gospels began to be written before 50 A.D. and yet they claim that the deity of Jesus was an invention of the church at the end of the first century. Either they are ignorant of the prophecies the Apostles applied to Jesus or they simply cling to refutable theories because they choose not to believe. Our culture is paying the price. They refer to our decline as progress. They have rejected the source of wisdom that first made the nation great. (Isaiah 5:20)

Let me devote the rest of the message to how we can individually get back to this discipline of studying the Word. It can be difficult, daunting, even boring if we just read straight through the Bible without aid. There are numerous resources today that take away all our excuses. Study Bibles abound as well as Bible handbooks and commentaries.

I have found it most helpful to change my pattern of study occasionally. One year, read through the Bible like we did last year along with a Bible handbook to get the basic understanding of when each book was written, its theme and outline. You can also use my on-line classes Understanding the Old Testament. The next year take one or two books of the Bible and study them one paragraph a day reading through a commentary

**Commented [notes17]: Matthew 5:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

**Commented [notes18]: Isaiah 64:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.

**Commented [notes19]: Matthew 7:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

**Commented [notes20]: Matthew 19:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> and said, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"

**Commented [notes21]: Luke 13:33 (ESV)**

<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem."

**Commented [notes22]: Matthew 26:64 (ESV)**

<sup>64</sup> Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."

**Commented [notes23]: Romans 8:29 (ESV)**

<sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

**Commented [notes24]: Isaiah 5:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

that makes it come alive. The next year you may want to read a couple of Study Bibles side by side and use their resources. A friend of mine developed a web site to help you do that, [www.studiedbible.org](http://www.studiedbible.org)

As you study, underline things that stand out to you. Make notes on what it seems to be addressing your life. Ask yourself what you just read, who wrote it, when, who was the recipient, what was the author saying, and what eternal truth is there. Don't just read to check off your "to do" list, but **read to hear from God**. Realize that it is God's revelation of Himself to you and instruction for your good.

When you come across confusing or difficult passages, ask someone that is very familiar with the Bible to help you understand it. There are several books on the difficult passages of the Bible. And if there has been a question in your heart, listen for the passage to address that problem. You'll be amazed at how often the passage you are studying says something about your situation.

The author of Hebrews told us that the Word is alive and powerful! One helpful tool in approaching your time of study is to pray first and ask God to speak to you through it. The psalmist wrote, *<sup>18</sup> Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.* Psalm 119:18 (ESV) When we come to the Bible reverently, in the same manner we should come to our special time of prayer, we prepare our hearts to receive.

Like all the disciplines, we need to make it a priority in our schedule. Unless we make it a practice to set aside a regular time, we will never get around to it. The fruitful men and women of God set aside the first hours of their day for prayer and study of the Word. (Psalm 63:1) I have found that it begins the night before. If we do not get to bed early enough, we won't wake early enough. I guarantee you that if you start with an easy goal of say 15 minutes, and you do that consistently, you will want to add to that time. The longer you practice this habit, the more time you'll want to take.

When you have finished your time in the Word, **conclude with prayer asking the Holy Spirit to help you apply what you have read** or give you the prompting to live out what you have learned. If there was a verse that was the voice of God to you, you may want to write it down to review or memorize. If there was an action you need to take, put a sticky note where it will remind you to follow through.

Don't forget what this is about, following Jesus, being His disciple, and being transformed into His image. Our minds are being conformed to the mind of Christ. We are washing and renewing our mind with the Word of God. (Romans 12:2) It changes the way we look at everything!

I'm going to ask you to do something that will seem intimidating at first, but that I think you'll find exciting when you do it. If the Holy Spirit leads you, share what you learned in a conversation. (Deuteronomy 6:6-7) You don't have to force it. God will give you the

**Commented [notes25]: Psalm 63:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

**Commented [notes26]: Romans 12:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> 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.

**Commented [notes27]: Deuteronomy 6:6-7 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

opportunity. It should be natural. Allow me to illustrate. Perhaps someone will be talking about how stressed they are about the economy and their future, and that morning you just read about trusting God in all circumstances. You can say that you know how they feel, and that must be a coincidence because this very morning you just read about how we need to trust God and not be afraid. You might relay the story or verse you read as best you can. The Holy Spirit will help you.

Now, I realize there is a stigma on bringing up religious issues with people, and I'm not saying to be rude. If they tell you they don't want to hear it, fine, just drop it. You can even say you hope you didn't offend them and were just trying to help. More often than not, they will respond positively and thank you. Our days are planned by God. (Psalm 139:16) What you read that morning is not just for you. God will give you opportunities to encourage others with it. You may even feel led to lead out in a conversation with what you learned that morning from the Word. They might tell you they don't believe the Bible. They still heard it, and you can bet it will speak to them for days to come.

Finally, let me return to necessity of these two disciplines of prayer and study of God's word with closing quotation from E.M. Bounds. *"The Word of God is the food, by which prayer is nourished and made strong. Prayer, like man, cannot live by bread alone, 'but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord.' Unless the vital forces of prayer are supplied by God's Word, prayer, though earnest even vociferous in its urgency, is in reality flabby, vapid and void. The absence of vital force in praying can be traced to the absence of a constant supply of God's Word by which to repair the waste, and renew the life. He who would learn to pray well, must first study God's Word and store it in his memory and thought."*

Where there is no prayer with study of the Word, there can be no spiritual growth. These two disciplines are the means by which the Spirit of God transforms us into the image of Christ. Are you a Christian, a follower of Jesus? If so, then these disciplines will certainly be a part of your spiritual life. We will go on to look at other helpful disciplines, but these are the two essential ones without which your spirit will shrivel and die.

The Lord will work on you externally through the circumstances in your life to change you because He loves you, but you must decide whether or not you will allow Him to work on you internally through the Word of God and prayer. Do you love Him? According to Jesus, your answer will be evident by your willingness to hear and obey His Word. *If you love me, you will keep my commandments.* (John 14:15) Next week we will look at the discipline that ties these first two together to transform us.

Will you begin today a daily habit of spending time in the Word of God and prayer?

Questions

**Commented [notes28]: Psalm 139:16 (ESV)**  
<sup>16</sup> Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

**Commented [notes29]:** E.M. Bounds, *The Necessity of Prayer*, p. 68

- 1 Why must prayer and the Word go together?
- 2 What does 2Timothy 2:15 teach us?
- 3 Why should we study the Word?
- 4 How did Jesus use the Word?
- 5 List some study suggestions.
- 6 How do we find the time for Bible study?
- 7 What should we do after reading?
- 8 What was the Pastor's challenge?
- 9 Review the Bounds' quotes.
- 10 How are prayer and study related?