

Studying the Bible Prayerfully and Obediently

Multiply--part 8, page 109-122

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DAY 1: Studying the Bible Devotionally.

1. What is the bible?

- The bible is God's *voice* to us.
- The bible is *revelation*. It reveals who God is, His character and purposes, and it reveals who we are: how we were designed to live, how we've gone wrong and how to get back on God's path for us.
- The bible is essentially a "love letter" from God to you.

Which of these bullet points is most important to you?

2. Your approach to the bible is very important.

- It is not *primarily* a textbook, history book, rulebook, or science book.
- Our goal is not just to master content.
- The bible is not a book that we critique. It is a book that critiques us!

What would you say is your general approach to the bible?

3. "*Devotional*" reading is reading with the intent to develop your *relationship* with God. We read to become more *devoted* to Him. As we read, we also dialogue with Him about what we're reading. Let's take this example...

Isaiah 55:1 "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. (2) Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare."

4. This is an invitation from God.

a. What is God offering? (He's offering more than physical bread and wine!)

b. How much will it cost you?

c. Why do we not take God up on this invitation?

d. What would we "rather" do? (55:2). What is the result?

e. What strikes you most from Isaiah 55:1-2. Talk to God about what you read.

DAY 2: Reading the Bible Dependently.

1. Have you ever read a chapter of the bible and said, "I didn't understand anything I just read?" One reason is that our approach to the bible is more like a movie critic than a dependent child.

1 Corinthians 2:9 However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"--¹⁰ but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.

2. Do we have the ability to understand the things of God through our own ability?

3. Instead of *man figuring out* what God is saying, what does *God do?* (2:10)

1 Cor. 2:11 ... no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.¹² We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.

4. Is our job to figure out what God is saying?

5. How do we understand the things of God?

6. How does the (a) futility of man figuring out what God is saying, and (b) we can only understand what God is saying to us if we are depending on the Spirit of God strike you?

1 Cor. 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.

7. What is the most likely outcome of a man, through his own mind, understanding the things of God? What will be his conclusion about what he reads?

8. When we read the bible, we *must* approach what we read *dependently and humbly*. Otherwise, our reading will accomplish nothing. How are you doing in the dependence and humility traits?

9. Talk to God about your approach to reading the bible.

DAY 3: Reading the Bible Obediently.

1. One of the reasons we need the bible is our tendency to stray away from God and how He wants us to live. We stray away without even knowing we're doing it!

James 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

2. What two responses does James envision from us as we read God's word?

3. If we just listen/read God's word *only*, what danger do we face?

James 1:23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

4. James illustrates only listening to the word instead of putting it into practice. What is the essence of his illustration?

5. For my high school junior prom, I spent the whole dinner time (with ten of us) with my bow tie hanging sideways by ONE clip! When I was in front of a mirror after dinner, I was mortified. I immediately DID something about it! Have you ever neglected to check yourself in a mirror?

James 1:25 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.

6. What does James promise to those who obey God's word? (Look for two answers!)

7. The following acronym (SPACEPETS) has helped me apply something I've read in the bible. After reading a chapter, I go back and ask these questions. Is there a(n):

- Sin to confess?
- Promise to claim?
- Attitude to change?
- Command to obey?
- Example to follow?
- Prayer to pray?
- Error to avoid?
- Truth to remember?
- Something to do?

DAY 4: Studying with Faith.

1. One of the strange things we do when reading the bible is affirm a truth, but then not put that truth into practice. We nod our heads at sermon points the pastor teaches, but little ponder whether or not we are putting them into practice. Our "unwritten" expectation is, "Did I learn something new?" instead of "Am I practicing what I know?"

2. James illustrates this very tendency...

James 1:26 If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

3. The passage we studied yesterday continues with the verses you just read. It's one thing to read/listen to God's word. It's another thing to put it into practice. In the same way, it's one thing to "consider ourselves religious" (or spiritual), and yet go right on living the same way we always have.

4. What examples does James give us of areas to consider whether or not we are obeying? (Look for four examples?).

5. My mentor used to tell me that we Christians can consider something God says as "true," but not "real." He meant that our tendency is to affirm the truth of God's word, but those truths do not necessarily become "real" in our daily lives. Can you think of an example where this is true for you?

6. Let me give some examples of where we're prone to separate what we hold as "true" and what we *do* as "real."

- Serving
- Giving
- Forgiving someone
- Walking in God's forgiveness
- Reaching out to someone
- Getting godly counsel when making important decisions
- Asking forgiveness when you are harsh with someone
- Other: _____

7. Is there something that you hold as "true" that needs to become "real?" This week?!

DAY 5: Reading the Bible Transformationally.

1. Our usually approach in hearing a sermon, studying the bible on our own, or attending a bible study is to evaluate the study based on, "Did I learn something new?" There's nothing wrong with learning something new, but it is too low a goal! The most scathing words Jesus spoke were to men who "knew" the bible (information; facts) backwards and forwards, but whose lives were a million miles away from obedience to what they knew.

Let's look at an old example. *Most* of God's people were in exile in Babylon. *Some* were still in Jerusalem when the city fell.

Ezekiel 33:21 In the twelfth year of our exile, ... a man who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, "The city has fallen!" ...²³ Then the word of the LORD came to me:²⁴ "Son of man, the people living in those ruins in the land of Israel are saying, 'Abraham was only one man, yet he possessed the land. But we are many; surely the land has been given to us as our possession.'²⁵ Therefore say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Since you eat meat with the blood still in it and look to your idols and shed blood, should you then possess the land?²⁶ You rely on your sword, you do detestable things, and each of you defiles his neighbor's wife. Should you then possess the land?'

2. What did the people think God would do?

3. What was God's attitude toward the people, and their expectations of Him?

²⁷ "Say this to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: As surely as I live, those who are left in the ruins will fall by the sword, those out in the country I will give to the wild animals to be devoured, and those in strongholds and caves will die of a plague.²⁸ I will make the land a desolate waste, and her proud strength will come to an end, and the mountains of Israel will become desolate so that no one will cross them.²⁹ Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I have made the land a desolate waste because of all the detestable things they have done.'

4. How close are the expectations of God "should" do and what God promises to do?

³⁰ "As for you, son of man, your countrymen are talking together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, saying to each other, 'Come and hear the message that has come from the LORD.'³¹ My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain.³² Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice.

5. Contrast the attitudes of the people as they listen to Ezekiel teach, and what's actually going on when he teaches.

6. Reading the bible is not a game. It is serious business, both for you and those you love! What needs to change in your attitude or approach to the bible?