

Greetings:

The study that Pastor Pat brings on Sunday mornings is a reflection of the study for that week. It represents a lot of research. Not all of what he has prepared is communicated. In an attempt to continue the learning process, he is making available his study notes to the congregation.

They are edited, but not “book” ready. To the critical eye mistakes can be found. So he asks that you take the material with humility, teach-ability, and charity.

Enjoy and if you should have any questions or corrections, please do not hesitate to email him at [pastorpat@waukeshabile.org](mailto:pastorpat@waukeshabile.org).

**Date:** January 17, 2010

**Title:** You and Your Bible

**Text:** Nehemiah 8:1-12

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Waukesha Bible Church is a family of families seeking to live in the Storyline of the Bible. She is determined by design to have a God-centered, Christ-exalting worship; a Word-centered teaching focused on personal discipleship through intentional and systematic instruction; a Global-impacting mission that resolves to be a church planting church; and a Grace-based fellowship where disciples are invited to live under a reigning grace characterized by a Gospel-driven sanctification that celebrates a divine monergism to the Christian life.

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 Theme:

**Introduction:**

It is not my intent to defend the credibility of the Bible or to show you why it is the Word of God. I am making an affirmation. I believe the Bible is the God-breathed book that is without error in its original form and will not lead into error when properly understood. In the words of our own Constitution:

**The Holy Scriptures** — We believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the verbally inspired Word of God,<sup>1</sup> without error in the original writings,<sup>2</sup> infallible when properly handled,<sup>3</sup> and the final authority for faith and life.<sup>4</sup> (1) John 16:12-13 • (2) Matt. 5:18 • (3) 2 Pet. 1:20-21 • (4) 2 Tim. 3:15-17

With this understood, we will proceed.

The written Word of God is an unprecedented privilege and treasure to possess. It is only within the last 100 years with modern technology that its availability is so wide-spread. I come from an evangelical tradition that saw daily Bible reading and personal spirituality or holiness as inseparably linked. Yet the idea of reading your Bible daily is until recently a novelty. Historically, people did not have available to them the written Word of God. And its availability, although costly, did not guarantee that the individual was literate. Those who knew God knew Him through oral communication and visual images. I note this only to take the harsh edge off of daily Bible reading. Reading your Bible is not a Christian duty, but an unprecedented privilege.

My intent is to show you why you should take advantage of this incredibly unique opportunity to hear God's Word and to avail yourself of it on a regular basis.

**The Storyline:**

The Bible is the Story of God written. It tells us of creation, fall, condemnation and redemption. Its defining personage is the Story's Hero and how His arrival is set in the context of two competing seeds. When read as Story, the Bible is a compelling narrative. My desire is for us to lay hold of the Bible's grandeur and to gladly immerse ourselves into it.

**Questions:**

1. What does the term "verbally inspired" mean?
2. Has daily Bible reading always been a part of the Christian walk?
3. Who should read the Bible?
4. List reasons as to why believers should read the Bible.
5. How does the Bible describe itself?
6. What can each of these descriptions solicit within His people?

7. How do I as a believer become translucent without anything to hide and with all to be seen?
8. Does anything else written have the kind of power inherent in the Word of God? Can anything else written do for us what the Word does?
9. How can we foster and encourage a desire for the Word in our own life?
10. What can be a proper response to the Word of God in a public setting?
11. If a fellow believer told you they always felt defeated, what advice would you offer them? Where would you turn for strength and victory?
12. What do you think is the key factor behind all Bible reading?
13. Look at Mark 4:35-41. Read it several times and ask yourself the questions of who, what, where, when, how, and why as described above. Become a detective. Write them down and share them at our next meeting.

The Holy Spirit is calling to us from this passage to consider three ideas.

**To Know:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to know Him through His written Word.

**To Choose:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose to read the Story He has written.

**To Feel:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy of placing ourselves into His Story.

I would like to consider this idea by asking and answering five questions.

### **Outline:**

#### I. WHO SHOULD READ THE BIBLE?

Although we might respond by saying, "Everyone should read the Bible," the Bible makes it very clear that every believer should read their Bible. The imagery the Bible uses to show us the necessity to know its content is described as life-sustaining food. Several passages bring this truth out.

##### A. Matthew 4:4

"But He answered and said, 'It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, **BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD**'" (Matt. 4:4).

When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness he invited Him to turn stone into bread. The life-giving force of the Word of God is contrasted with that which is sustained by physical food. Just as physical bread is indispensable for physical life, so also is spiritual bread (the Word of God) indispensable for spiritual life.

"In reply to this artful temptation, Christ answered by a quotation from the Old Testament. The place is found in De 8:3. In that place the discourse is respecting manna." (Albert Barnes on Matthew 4:4)

The contrast created in the text is intentional. The devil and his ilk wish for us to believe we need something more than what we already have in God. The question Satan invites us to consider is simple, "God is necessary, but is He enough or do we need more?" He wants us to believe we need something more than what we already have in God. Do we need bread to live? Yes, but bread alone can never do for us what only God can. In addition to physical bread, we must have spiritual bread. This is the bread of life that only God can provide. There is something life-sustaining in the Word of God.

#### B. 1 Peter 2:2

The apostle Peter contrasts the works of the flesh with that of the new birth and speaks to one's desire for the Word and what it produces in those who partake of it.

<sup>1</sup> "Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, <sup>2</sup> like newborn babies, **long for the pure milk of the word**, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation" (1 Pet. 2:1, 2).

The word "long for" used by Peter is a compound word and speaks to intense longing. It is used of earnestly desiring or of lusting. It is a craving or hunger that seeks fulfillment or pacification. First Peter 2:2 speaks of a longing that the child of God is to have toward the Word. To desire is to pursue with love and to long after. The metaphor Peter employs suggests that just as physical babies hunger for the milk, so too should believers hunger for the Word of God. This text clearly points out how the purpose for seeking the Word of God is for growth in respect to understanding salvation and all it entails.

#### C. 1 Corinthians 3:1, 2; Hebrews 5:12-14

My intent in sharing these two passages is to show how the Christian is to be exercised in the Word of God so that they might grow in their understanding of who God is, what He has done and who they are in Him.

<sup>1</sup> "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. <sup>2</sup> **I gave you milk to drink, not solid food**; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, <sup>3</sup> for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?" (1 Cor. 3:1-3).

<sup>12</sup> "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and **you have come to need milk and not solid food**. <sup>13</sup> For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. <sup>14</sup> But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil" (Heb. 5:12-14).

Both passages teach the nurturing element contained within the Bible. There is an expected progression inherent within the Word of God. Christians are to “feed” on the Word of God. Christian maturity is linked to Bible reading and the development of our spiritual discernment because of it. There is a difference between milk and meat. One is for infants and the other for adults. Every believer needs to be in the Word of God. It is the primary instrument God uses to grow us. Let us now consider our second question.

## II. WHY SHOULD I READ THE BIBLE?

We have noted above that the Word of God is a nourishing food. There is a fundamental quality inherent in the Word of God that must be addressed. The Bible pictures itself in various ways in order to describe this inherent quality. I would like to offer eight reasons as to why we should read the Bible.

### A. Because It Is A Guiding Light (Ps 119:10, 104, 105)

“With all my heart I have sought You; **Do not let me wander from Your commandments**” (Ps. 119:10).

“From Your precepts I get understanding; **Therefore I hate every false way**” (Ps. 119:104).

**“Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path”** (Ps. 119:105).

The Word of God acts as a lighthouse in this world of darkness. It is an absolute standard. It will not vacillate or waver in its values, ideals or principles. Much confusion exists among the people of God simply because they do not know God through His Word. Clarity happens when we intentionally submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit’s instruction through His Word.

### B. Because It Is A Nourishing Food (Ps 119:103 [cf Pss. 19:10; 119:72, 127]; Jer. 15:16; Matt. 4:4 [Deut 8:3]; 1 Pet. 2:2 [1 Cor. 3:2; Heb. 5:12, 13])

**“How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”** (Ps. 119:103).

“Therefore I love Your commandments Above gold, yes, above fine gold” (Ps. 119:127).

“Your words were found and I ate them, And **Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart**; For I have been called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts” (Jer. 15:16).

Notice the heightened language of the Scripture. God used the emotional stirrings of His people to picture just how delicious the Word of God is. The Word of God is that upon which we are to feed. Scripture is clear; it alone is to feed our soul. All other items are nothing but

empty husks and polluted pools. Growth is to be anticipated, expected, and seen in all believers. Not all believers, however, will grow at the same rate, but all believers will grow.

C. Because It Is A Cleansing Agent (Ps 119:9, 11; John 15:3; 17:17; Eph. 5:26)

<sup>8</sup> "I shall keep Your statutes; Do not forsake me utterly! <sup>9</sup> Beth. **How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word.** <sup>10</sup> With all my heart I have sought You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments. <sup>11</sup> **Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You**" (Ps. 119:8-11).

**"You are already clean because of the word** which I have spoken to you" (John 15:3).

**"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth"** (John 17:17).

"so that He might sanctify her, **having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word**" (Eph. 5:26).

The Scripture speaks to the journey that exists between one's justification and one's glorification. This journey is a Word saturated and sourced journey. In the midst of this journey the Word of God does an internal work of changing us from glory to glory. It is a cleansing of our old in Adam habits and the putting on of our new in Christ behavior.

Psalm 119:9 uses the word "cleanse." It speaks of a translucent makeup. It is to be innocent of charges and wrongdoing. How do I as a believer become translucent without anything to hide and with all to be seen? It happens by taking heed, by guarding, by being hedged about with the Word of God. We must hide God's Word in our hearts. **To hide God's Word carries the idea of having sufficient deposits so you can make appropriate withdrawals.** Most people buckle under the burden because they have not made the Word of God a priority. The Word of God sees us for what we are. It alone is capable of cutting through the garbage and revealing to us our real selves. It alone has the effectual power to conquer our old in Adam habits and set us on the path of moral purity.

D. Because It Is A Saving Power (Rom. 1:16; 2 Tim. 3:15)

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is **the power of God for salvation** to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).

"and that from childhood you have known **the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation** through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15).

Both Romans 1:16 and 2 Timothy 3:15 use the word **dunamai**. From it we get our English word dynamite. The Greek word means, "the power or ability to accomplish a stated task." The gospel has the power to save souls, restore sinners, and support the sorrowing. It has this

kind of power. No other work has this quality (See also 1 Cor. 1:18, 24; 2:5; 2 Cor. 6:7 [all references use **dunamai**])

There is only one element that can break the chains of sin and bolster the sorrowing and it is the power of God as manifested in the Gospel.

E. Because It Is A Protective Weapon (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12)

“And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and **the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God**” (Eph. 6:17).

<sup>11</sup> “Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience. <sup>12</sup> **For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword**, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. <sup>13</sup> And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:11-13).

Paul speaks to the idea that the Word of God is the sword of the Spirit. The Word of God not only defends but also discerns. We see this in the way our Lord Jesus fought off the onslaughts of the devil in the wilderness temptation. We must have hidden the Word within our hearts and minds in order that we can keep temptation at bay. It is only as we recall the truths of the Story and declare them as our own that we can know the victory that is rightfully ours in Christ.

F. Because It Reveals Christ and thus Eternal Life (John 20:31; 1 John 5:13)

“but **these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God**; and that believing **you may have life** in His name” (John 20:31).

“These things **I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life**” (1 John 5:13).

The intent of Scripture is to reveal Christ. Everything else flows from this and to this singular idea. There is no other purpose. The voice of Scripture rallies around this one overriding predominant pervasive idea and that is the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Scripture is given in order that we might know Christ and in so doing have eternal life.

We believe that all the Scriptures center about the Lord Jesus Christ in His person and work in His first and second coming, and hence that no portion, even of the Old Testament, is properly read, or understood, until it leads to Him. (Dallas Theological Seminary Doctrinal Statement)

Friends, I do not know how all this works; I only know it does. This is what the Scripture says concerning itself and I believe this. I am not assigning it these qualities. These are qualities it assigns to itself. This leads us to our third question.

### III. WHAT IS BIBLE READING?

Whether you chose to read through the Bible or focus on a theme or book, all Bible reading should put you into the Word of God. Bible reading has many different “shapes and sizes.” There is perhaps no exclusively correct way. However, the intent of all approaches should be to familiarize yourself with God's Word and to implement its truths within your life. Let us now consider our fourth question.

### IV. HOW SHOULD I READ MY BIBLE?

I would like to offer you three key elements that will assist us in having a disciplined and profitable time of Bible reading.

A. Read The Bible Systematically (Psalm 119:11; 2 Timothy 2:15).

**“Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You”** (Ps. 119:11).

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, **accurately handling** the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

Whatever Bible reading schedule you end up choosing, make sure it is at a prescribed time, in a quiet place, using a definite plan. When cutting one’s grass everyone, without exception, uses a method. Every method used is perhaps different, but everyone uses a method. Some cut their lawn horizontally, others vertically, others in a descending box and others have their own pattern, but without exception everyone uses a method. No one cuts their grass randomly, thus why do we read our Bibles randomly? **Beware of the barrenness of an overactive life.** Do not allow the good to take the place of the best.

B. Read The Bible Believingly (Hebrews 4:2).

<sup>1</sup> “Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. <sup>2</sup> For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word **they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard**” (Heb. 4:1, 2).

This passage has always intrigued me. Why? Because both parties were the recipients of God’s Word. Both had the same material to work with and yet only one group profited or benefited from the Word that was given. Why? The key is found in the word “mixed”. It is a fascinating word. It is only found two times in the entire New Testament. First, in 1 Corinthians 12:24 where it is translated in this way, “God hath *tempered* the body *together*” and then in Hebrews 4:2 where it is translated by the phrase, “*being mixed with*”. The thought is that of putting together or blending two objects so that they become one.

Has the Word of God blended with your life in such a way as to become inseparably linked with your life? You believe God's Word when you have made it feel at home as well as having mixed it with faith.

Faith is necessary in understanding the Bible. Faith takes God at His Word. Faith is never blind. If God said it, it is true. Faith believes that. Faith believes even when it does not understand. Like a paratrooper we must be completely convinced and utterly persuaded that the parachute will hold us.

### C. Read The Bible Carefully (Acts 17:10-12).

<sup>10</sup> "The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. <sup>11</sup> Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for **they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily** to see whether these things were so. <sup>12</sup> Therefore many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men" (Acts 17:10-12).

Study demands effort. The Bereans are identified by the descriptive word "noble-minded". It means "to be well born, of noble race, noble minded". Why were they considered to be of a noble race; because they allowed the Word to have entrance into their lives? The Word was warmly received. It was made to feel at home. They were eager to receive the Word.

However it did not stop there. They are described by the word, "searched". This particular word is very descriptive. It means, "To investigate, examine, inquire into, scrutinize, sift, question specifically in a forensic sense of a judge to hold an investigation; to interrogate, examine the accused or witnesses." Notice its usage in the following passages **Luke 23:14; Acts 4:9; 12:19; 28:18**. Remember, the key to understanding the Scripture is to bombard the text with questions and that is exactly what we see in the various passages before us as well as by those in Berea. What has always amazed me about this passage is that these Bereans were more than passive attendees. They had someone no less than the apostle Paul preaching to them and yet they compared what he said against what the Scripture taught. We must be more than unreceptive hearers but rather passionate seekers. This leads us to our final question.

### V. WHAT SHOULD BE MY RESPONSE TO BIBLE READING (Nehemiah 8:1-12)?

A lot of people find joy in simply accumulating facts about the Bible. The process, however, cannot stop with simple knowledge. There is a danger here that I want to warn against and avoid. The Bible is not an end in itself. The Bible is only a means to the end of knowing God in His person and work. The idea of reading your Bible regularly must be in the context of a real relationship. With this in mind let us consider Nehemiah 8:1-12. Notice the progression of the passage. There are four actions expressed by the people as they heard the Word read and then applied it.

A. They Stood When The Word Was Read (v. 5 "And As He Opened It, They Stood")

It was an unsolicited reaction. Why did they stand? BECAUSE GOD WAS SPEAKING! This great host of people stood in response to the Word being opened. A reason as to why we stand when the Word of God is read is to show Him respect.

B. They Listened When The Word Was Read (v. 3 "Morning Until Midday [NIV 'Daybreak - 1st Light]")

They were attentive. A period of about six hours had elapsed. Six Hours! Can you imagine the power of desire and concentration being exhibited in that place? They gave their 'ears' to what was being said. It is the same idea as **hupakouw**. The NIV translates the phrase "ears" w/ "listened attentively". They were seeking the A.I.M. (vv. 7, 8, 9, 12).

A rabbi (Maimonides - Hilchot Tephillah, c. 12. sect. 9.) had this to say concerning the passage, "that as soon as the reader begins the reading of the law, it is not lawful to speak about anything, not even the constitutions of the law, but silently to attend to what is read."

C. The Worshipped When The Word Was Read (v. 6 They Were In A Position Of Worship.)

Out of humble adoration they lifted up their hands and bowed their entire bodies before the Word of God. Why? Were they worshipping the book? No, they were worshipping God through the book. The book was God's Voice, thus they bowed before it. Oh that we would have such an attitude toward God's Word.

Verse seven gives us an interesting thought. As the Word was being read the priests of God were "causing the people to understand". They were explaining the author's intended meaning. The priests were the interpreters of their day. They were exegetes without equal. Verse eight says the Word was "distinct" or clear. They did not muddy the waters through their explanation of the text. They were determined that the people both hear and understand the Word of God. When the people understood God's Word, they wept. This is a power intrinsic to the Word of God (cf. Heb. 4:12).

D. They Wept When The Word Was Read (Vv. 9-12)

The Word exposed their sinful behavior and they repented. Here we see application. "There is only one right response to the living God, and that is to bow down and worship Him." (Mayhue, 178). What I find fascinating is that the priests did not want the people to stay in their forlorn position. They wanted the people to rejoice and be glad. Why, because the Word brings deliverance through a proper knowledge of God.

“The proclamation of the Word of God, the teaching of the Word of God, is not to be considered commonplace, just something we have heard done all of our lives. That's profaning the Book and its Author. It is a great privilege to have the Bible in our hands, to know it and understand it, to receive it, to feed on it, and obey it.” (Mayhue, 179).

**Shepherding the Sheep:** (What's the NEXT STEP?)

- Learn all you can about God's Word. Make it your constant companion. Befriend it and it will richly reward you.
- Love the God of the Word and you will love the Word of God.
- Live your life as a student of God's Word. Make it your constant companion and you will learn to live a life marked by rest and fulfillment.
- Come to Church. Study the Bible with the desire to learn of God and to worship Him.