

When Winter Comes

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 Title: When Winter Comes and the Sufficiency of Scripture
 Text: Misc.
 Theme: The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to sustain the people of God during their winter seasons.

Introduction:

There is an old proverb: You don't miss your water until your well runs dry.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, (1706-1790), Poor Richard's Almanac, 1746 said, "When the well is dry, we know the worth of water."

Spiritual vitality keeps us hydrated while pilgrims in this desert land. Perhaps today your well is dry and you do not yet know it. My desire in this study is two-fold: first, to protect ourselves from spiritual dehydration, and secondly, to check and see if we are spiritually dehydrated.

Jesus said He is the living water, the living bread, the way, the truth, the life, He said He is the vine, and those who partake of Him will no never thirst or hunger again, yet here I find myself dry as dust with a parched throat and no water in sight. What am I to do when the well runs dry?

Why am I teaching this?

Americans and the Bible: Bible Ownership, Reading, Study and Knowledge in the United States by Michael J. Vlach

The Christian Bible continues to be a revered book in the United States. In fact, no other book comes close to having been read and re-read as much as the "Good Book". Every year, millions of Bibles are printed in this country. Researcher George Gallup points out that so many Bibles have been printed in the United States "that even rough estimates of the total number published to date do not exist." ¹

How do Americans use the Bible and what do they know about it? Recent research has produced important information about Bible ownership, reading, study, and knowledge in the United States.

Bible Ownership

Most Americans own a Bible. In fact, 92% of households in America own at least one copy. Of those households that own a Bible, the average number of Bibles is three. This includes not only the homes of practicing Christians but hundreds of thousands of atheists as well. ²

Bible Reading

Although most Americans own a Bible, use of the Bible varies significantly. In a poll taken by the Gallup Organization in October, 2000, 59% of Americans reported that they read the Bible at least occasionally. This is down from 73% in the 1980s. The percentage of Americans who read the Bible at least once a week is 37%. This is down slightly from 40% in 1990. ³ According to the Barna Research Group, those who read the Bible regularly spend about 52 minutes a week in the scriptures. ⁴ Barna, "The Bible," data is from 1997.

Which gender is more faithful at reading the Bible at least weekly? The prize goes to the women. Women (42%) are more likely than men (32%) to have read the Bible in the past week.

Bible Study

When it comes to going beyond merely reading the Bible to actual study of the Bible, the numbers decline sharply. Only one in seven Americans report an involvement that goes beyond just reading the Bible. Fourteen percent of Americans currently belong to a Bible study group. ⁶ This is down a full one-third from 1990 when 21% said they were involved in a Bible study group. ⁷

Bible Knowledge

How about knowledge of the Bible? According to Gallup, "Despite the impressive statistics concerning Bible reading and study, it is apparent that ignorance about its contents is widespread." ⁸

¹ George Gallup, Jr., *The Role of the Bible in American Society* (Princeton: The Princeton Religion Research Center, 1990)

² Barna Research Online, "The Bible," www.barna.org. This information is based on 1993 figures.

³ Alec Gallup and Wendy W. Simmons, "Six in Ten Americans Read Bible at Least Occasionally," The Gallup Organization, www.gallup.com, October 20, 2000.

⁴ Barna, "The Bible," data is from 1997.

⁶ Gallup, "Six in Ten Americans Read Bible at Least Occasionally,"

⁷ Gallup, The Role of the Bible in American Society, 17.

⁸ Ibid.

If this is true, then Christians are spiritually dehydrated.

How will they best hear?

Water is the only beverage that can be consumed in nearly unlimited quantities. Water is the second most important nutrient for life, just after oxygen. More than two-thirds of the human body is made up of water, and the brain is nearly 85 percent water. Our drinking water comes from freshwater lakes, streams, and underground reservoirs.

An average person's body is approximately 70 percent water -- about 45 quarts! Water courses through every part of the body-blood, muscle and even bones. Water helps you live by regulating temperature, removing waste and carrying vital oxygen and nutrients.

While visiting Papua New Guinea I was introduced in a dramatic way to the idea of hydrating the body through massive amounts of water intake. Should water go without replenishment for too long, dehydration may set in -- a dangerous condition that can lead to serious illness and even death?

- **What is Dehydration?**

Dehydration is the loss of water and important blood salts. Organs such as the brain, kidneys and even the heart can fail to function without an adequate supply of water and salt. Water and salt can be lost through extreme sweating, diarrhea or by simply failing to drink enough water.

- **Signs of Dehydration**

Dehydration can be broken out into three major stages: mild, moderate and severe. People with mild dehydration may feel thirsty and experience dry lips. Those with moderate dehydration may have extremely dry mouths, sunken eyes and skin that lose elasticity when slightly pinched and released. In severe cases, dehydrated people will experience all signs of moderate dehydration and may have rapid, weak pulses, cold extremities, rapid breathing, blue lips and confusion and lethargy.

- **How do you prevent dehydration**

Drink plenty of fluids. Humans should never lose more fluids than they take in.

What is the biblical ideal?

The Westminster Confession reads as follows in chapter 1 concerning the Holy Scripture.

It pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His Church; and afterwards for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and **for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which makes the Holy Scripture to be most necessary;** those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased.

The parallels between our physical well-being and our spiritual well-being are tremendous. As the people of God we must hydrate our spiritual bodies with the cool clear water of God or we will dry up and die.

Many within any given fellowship do not read the Scripture regularly. Perhaps the only Scriptural intake they have is on Sunday mornings and then they find it either too long or too hard. It isn't that the study is too long or too hard, the problem is that we are spiritually dehydrated and we have gotten to the point of having to sip instead of drink in the Word of God.

There are at least 5 pictures describing the Word of God and each one gives us suggestions as to what that Word is to be for us.

I. The Bible is described as a nourishing food during our winter seasons (Job 23:12, Ps. 119:103, Jer. 15:16, Matt. 4:4, 1 Pet. 2:2).

Job 23:12 "I have not departed from the command of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.

The word 'treasured' is the same word 'hid' in Psalm 119:11. The idea is that of value, of esteem. We place such a high premium on the Word of God that we gather it like we would gold or silver. In fact, our estimation of it is so significant that we view it to be greater than our daily food allotment.

Psalm 19:10 They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.

Psalm 119:103 How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

The word 'desire' is the same word used of a man's desire for a woman (Sol. 2:3, Prov. 6:25). The language employed by Scripture is so picturesque. The Word of God takes precedence over financial security and physical appetites.

Jeremiah 15:16 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.

When the prophet Jeremiah received the Word from the Lord, it was to him joy and the delight of his heart. There was a sense of gratification and celebration in having the Word of God.

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.'"

1 Peter 2:2 like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,

When confronted by physical appetites our Lord's appeal was to the Word of God. We can no more live without physical food than we can live without spiritual food. As believers there is to be a thirsting after the Word of God. We should want to read it, study it, hear it, and live it. If we do not have the desire for the Word, then we need to beg God to create within us that desire.

During our winter seasons we need to be feeding on the Word of God for our spiritual nourishment. We cannot afford to distance ourselves from the Word of God.

II. The Bible is described as a guiding light during our winter seasons (Ps. 119:105).

Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.

Why am I here, who am I, and where am I going? Such questions as these can only be answered by the Word of God. The Word of God opens up to us the mind of God. We know because He tells us what to know. In the absence of His Word, we walk in darkness.

ILLUSTRATION:

SWEETWATER, Tenn. Boasts the nation's biggest underground lake called the Lost Sea. The 4½-acre pool of water is about 300 feet below the cave entrance. There is more to the Lost Sea than the public can see. Divers have mapped at least 9 more acres in underwater chambers leading away from the lake, but no one has found the end, even with sonar. The attraction is part of a system of caves called Craighead Caverns, named for an Indian chief who lived in the early 1800s.

When you are standing in your group and the tour guide shuts off all the lights you just about go bonkers. I do not know if you have ever experienced total darkness, but if you have it is perhaps one of the most eerie feelings you can experience. I think it is almost impossible to stay calm when consumed by complete darkness.

In the absence of His Word we stand to be consumed by the darkness. During our winter seasons we need the Word of God to dissipate the darkness that seeks to consume us.

III. The Bible is described as a cleansing agent during our winter seasons (Ps. 119:9, 11, John 15:3, 17:17, Eph. 5:26).

Pss. 119:9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word. 11 Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You.

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

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

Ephesians 5:26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

The Word of God is the primary means used by the Holy Spirit to keep us from moral defilement in our journey through life. During our winter seasons we are more susceptible to moral defilement because we slowly abandon those disciplines that God has placed for our nourishment and protection.

ILLUSTRATION:

Many of us chuckle at a small child's response when they come in from playing outside and are told to wash up for dinner. First, they question the need and then their compliance is less than ideal.

In the absence of the Word of God during our winter seasons what we do not realize is the slow and subtle shift that can happen with regard to our personal defilement as we live in a fallen world. The Word of God is there to protect us from this moral defilement.

IV. The Bible is described as a saving power during our winter seasons (Rom. 1:16; 2 Tim. 3:15-17).

Rom. 1:16 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.

2 Tim. 3:15 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. 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

The same power that saves is the same power that sanctifies. The words 'power' and 'able' come from the word we have transliterated into English as 'dynamite.' The original word carries this idea, "The power or ability to accomplish the stated goal/task." The Word of God is the means God has established for the salvation of sinners and the sanctification of saints. It converts and cleanses.

ILLUSTRATION:

When the preacher's car broke down on a country road, he walked to a nearby roadhouse to use the phone. After calling for a tow truck, he spotted his old friend, Frank, drunk and shabbily dressed at the bar. "What happened to you, Frank?" asked the good reverend. "You used to be rich."

Frank told a sad tale of bad investments that had led to his downfall. "Go home," the preacher said. "Open your Bible at random, stick your finger on the page and there will be God's answer."

Some time later, the preacher bumped into Frank, who was wearing a Gucci suit, sporting a Rolex watch and had just stepped out of a Mercedes.

“Frank.” said the preacher, “I am glad to see things really turned around for you.” “Yes, preacher, and I owe it all to you,” said Frank. “I opened my Bible, put my finger down on the page and there was the answer—Chapter 11.” *Reader’s Digest*, March, 1993, p. 71

During our winter seasons the Word of God is a powerful companion.

V. The Bible is described as a protective weapon during our winter seasons (Eph. 6:17).

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

We see this same principle with our Lord when tempted by the Devil (Matt. 4).

ILLUSTRATION:

The Word of God is light a Jedi Knight’s light saber. When that thing is pulled and used skillfully, it is a protective weapon.

APPLICATION: (What difference does it make?)

I will come back to this in December, but we are putting together an opportunity for you to read through and memorize several passages of Scripture. Why, as a means of staying spiritually hydrated.

Inside your bulletin there is a 3x5 card. We are inviting you to participate as a fellowship in the memorization and reading of the Scripture. Take some time to think through this. If you wish to participate in the ‘program,’ please fill in the card and turn it into the office during the week or put it in the offering plate next Sunday.

I would love to see a large portion of this fellowship participate in this program. Even if you only do half of what is being asked, you will benefit greatly from it. The benefit to us as a fellowship will be tremendous.