
Knowing the Bible Better

Into Thy Word Ministries www.intothyword.org

Does this sound too scary? Fear not; the sweetness we have available to us is far greater than the sour we may encounter!

How well do you know the Bible? Do you rationalize it, fake it, or ignore it, or do not make the effort or exercise diligence to really get to know it? I know that I have! Here is a simple, easy way to learn the Bible! But, before we can learn it, we have to discover what is in the way of our receptiveness to His Word?

Eat God's Word!

How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. Psalm 119:9

How well do you know the Bible? Most Christians may say “fairly well,” and we pastors will say “very well,” but secretly, we may be in fear that others will find out that we do not know His Word so well after all. Many of us may rationalize it, fake it, or ignore it, but for some reason, we do not make the effort or exercise diligence to really get to know it. Perhaps, it is too much work for some; perhaps, the fear factor is too high and it is easier to say “yes, I know” (basically lie), than to actually get to know Christ and His Bible. Who am I talking about? Me...the guy who started an international ministry, teaching people how to study the Bible. When I first started this endeavor some 25 years ago, I was very biblically illiterate and faked my way through it. But, I had some good mentors who called me on it, so I endeavored be more diligent and get to know the Bible, finding it was not so fearful and daunting as I thought. In fact, it was fun—and still is. But, many Christians and even some pastors are still in the dark about His Word.

I have to own up to some judgmental feelings I have from time to time with this. When I give a seminar or consult with a church, every now and then I am absolutely astounded by some pastors who lack basic Bible knowledge. Just the other day, a pastor at a very large church asked me if I had ever heard of *Caleb*. I thought he must mean a person, so I was raking my mind about who he could be talking about. (I did not want to look dumb.) Then, he asked if this *Caleb* could be found in Genesis. It was one of those moments when my mouth opened but no words came out. I can understand why some Christians might not know that Caleb was one of the original few people of the Exodus who was faithful and allowed to enter the Promise Land, and that the story can be found in Numbers and Deuteronomy—but a pastor who did not know? I can also at times understand when Christians say they do not have the time or it is too hard to read the Bible—but pastors? Pastors, whose call and job it is to proclaim the

Word? I think we have a big problem with biblical literacy in America today. A lack of Bible knowledge (and application, since you can't apply what you do not know) will lead to very significant problems, such as a lost focus for the church locally and internationally, the spread of apostasy, or of false teachings; and, we have seen all of the above.

Now, I have to say up front that I did not end up knowing the Bible overnight; it took me many years—decades in fact and I am still getting to know His Word. And, when I first entered into ministry, the only reason I knew who Caleb was is because I knew someone with that name. I was lazy with the Bible, figuring it was more important to connect with the youth than learn His word or be a disciple or make disciples. But, I had not been to seminary yet or had years of experience and time under my belt as that pastor did. I came to a point that I had to own up to my frailty in Bible literacy, buckle down, and engage it. That pastor felt it was unimportant and irrelevant to his role as a pastor!

Many years ago my great uncle taught me the importance and relevance of knowing God's Word. He kept me accountable and told me it did not come overnight or easily; it is a life-long process and journey, and it takes hard work. There are no shortcuts to any important endeavor, whether it is learning music, becoming a doctor, becoming a pastor, or any skilled vocation or hobby. Undertaking something important is serious; it is commitment and it is hard work. At the same time, I had great fears about attempting to know His Word. I felt I would not be able to do it, which is why I faked it. I had significant learning disabilities including dyslexia, and learning for me was a tough challenge. With my uncle's encouragement and suggestions, I learned how to study and gather information. I developed a process that works and is even fun that anyone can use. In fact, I have been teaching this in my seminars since the early 80s to put people at ease when *exegetical* and *inductive* methods seem too daunting.

Gaining a Desire to Grasp God's Word

How many people do you know (perhaps yourself) who feel that the Bible is boring or too difficult or that they will never need these intense Bible study methods? Maybe what holds you back is the work ethic involved. Well, perhaps if you are never going to teach and you just want to learn His percepts, you do not need all the tools; you just need His Word and a desire to pursue it on a regular basis. However, even those who pursue reading the Bible on a regular basis can get frustrated and discouraged, and thus give it up. We do not want this to happen to you. It has happened to me many times; Bible study can be wearing at times. That is why we need a few ideas, techniques, and/or accountability to keep us on track.

In Revelation 10:8-11, God asks a strange thing of John; he asks him to "Take it and eat it," as in, *take God's Word and eat it!* This refers to "grasping" as in taking food for pleasure and nourishment. However, before we can be

nourished, we have to obtain it, and then we can eat and digest it. This applies to God's Word in that we have to get it, read it, understand it, and then apply it (Psalm 119:103).

But, if we really examine what He is saying, it is not so strange after all that we all must "eat" God's Word, the Bible. If we want a productive and purposeful Christian life, we have to get it in us first. Furthermore, before we can proclaim God message to others as a lifestyle or in words, it must be received, and it must convict and transform. Thus, to declare God's message so it can be heard by others, we have to have digested it. Before we can do that, we have to know it, as in *know it before we live it—and before we give it*. God told John to "eat" because he had to undergo conviction that was both bitter and sweet; it was bitter because of its news of suffering and conviction and sweet for its blessings of communion and restoration with God, as what we gain is so sweet. Thus, we may see another fear here, a fear of conviction, perhaps the reason so many of my colleagues do not get into His Word.

This passage is more about receiving God's Word for life—like food that is necessary and instrumental for us to survive and thrive; it is for sustenance and joy, as His precepts are. Then, He says to us and John that "your stomach will sour," perhaps indicating that the contents of this scroll will also contain suffering and a message of judgment that the people will not like because when we receive "bad news," it will "sour" us (as in sadden us), from all of these events coming in Revelation chapter 11. But, for our application, this also refers to the taking in of His Word; as we do, His Word comes across to our will and ideas and we will be challenged and convicted.

Why are they both bitter and sour? Because, God's ways must go deep within us, changing us from the inside out. His precepts convict and challenge us inside and out so to move us from our means and ways to His Way. Many people do not like this, even those in leadership, because it means they have to relinquish their will to His. Thus, leadership goes from being pretentious and arrogance-based to becoming Christ-driven, and many people really do not want that. They say they do, but they do not. Pride and self will are just too powerful and alluring for some because they cause us to transform and be challenged—a process that takes its toll on our will, satisfaction, resolution, and pride. Its ultimate bitterness is the cost of our surrender; as we relinquish ourselves to Him, He becomes in us more and we become less to ourselves.

But he also says it is sweet, "sweet as honey," conveying to us God's goodness, grace, and mercy, and that through His Word, both written and Spirit-led, we have *good news* from God's promises and our communion with Him, through which we receive His instructions and the knowledge of His nature including His grace, mercy, and goodness (Psalm 19:10; 119:103; Ezek. 2:3). This happens when His Word becomes a greater part of us, affecting all we are and do. Yet, its positive sweetness is that it enhances and improves us beyond

measure, and this is far, far greater than what we think we might lose. We can quickly forget its sweetness when all we see is what we think we lose rather than the bounty of what we gain (Rom. 12; Heb 4:12).

Conversely, we are called to heed God's Word, to cling to His precepts which are sweet, and take them seriously; this can be bitter as we must allow His conviction to remove what is in His way for our growth and betterment, and be pointed to His Worth and Glory. If not, there will be judgment from our own misdeeds, accumulating and implementing their way back to us, as well as opening us up to God's judgment (Num. 5:23-31; Prov. 5:3-4; 24:13-14; Rom. 1:18-32; Rev. 7:13-14).

There is also a warning in this Revelation passage that His Word is not to be ignored or rejected because that would be the same as rejecting Him. It is also a warning that obedience may have a cost, and that we, too, will "sour" or suffer for the cause of Christ as we offer His "sweetness," such as forgiveness. As Christians, we are the representatives of God; yet, others may reject the message as well as the messenger—both God and us. Our allegiance is to Christ. We Christians are in Christ, and are a part of a greater Kingdom than one of race or nationality. This also refers to the *Abrahamic Promise* (Gen 12; 18:18; 22:18; Is. 60:1-5; Rev. 7:9-17; 11:9) which indicates that God's purpose and plan is inclusive to all; there are no peoples that are not a part of His will and plan; His purpose will be accomplished and nothing can stop Him. His message is universal as it not only applies to Christians, but to all people of all time (Rev. 5:9; 7:9; 11:2).

But, this will have a cost that also prevents us from getting into His Word! People do not want or like to be convicted of their sins. They would rather choose the sins that destroy them rather than choose the right and good path that blesses them. They may even refuse to acknowledge another and better way. The application, as John demonstrated, is our call to heed God's precepts and make them known to others, even though we may suffer for our obedience. However, whatever we endure, our reward will be far, far greater...*sweet* (Rev. 9:20).

So, do you want to get into His Word? Does it still sound too scary? Fear not; the sweetness we have available to us is far greater than the sour we may encounter! Getting into God's Word has to do with the fact that God's Word must first transform and "affect" us before it can be used to have an "effect" on others. The question for us is *what blocks this from happening?* Busyness? Fear? Conviction? What? The Gospel must be experienced and be impacting before it can be used to make an impact upon others.

As we feed on His Word, we grow from His precepts, and who we are and what we can be are significantly enhanced from His work in us; thus, our efforts to bring Him glory will, in turn, flourish. His Truth is the impact for whatever

condition or situation we face. We must allow Christ to transform us as we digest His principles and apply them to our lives and faith so we can be used by our Lord to influence and affect others. Truth is bitter to those who do not like it and to those of us who need to be moved and challenged to make room for it in our mindsets and worldviews. Are His Word and precepts a part of you? If not, why not? For us to thrive as His children and His messengers, His Word must be a part of us—deeply and passionately! This means that to be an effectual Christian, we must walk in Christ and remain trusting and faithful with our confidence and submission to Him. If not, we are of no use to God or to others, and we become the noise of 1 Cor. 13:1, not the love of verses three and onward.

In this passage in Revelation 10, the call is to be proactive—to take what the Lord has given and do as He has empowered and called.

- What has He called you to do, and with what?
- How many times do we ignore His call?

Allowing God's Word to transform and affect us before we engage more in the Christian life is essential, as to teach His precepts to others is paramount. God's Word is sweet as are His promises; however, it will be bitter when God's judgments commence; when we are in Him we do not need to worry, but, will He say "well done good and faithful servant" to you? What about if we ignore His Word, refuse to get in it, and just have all kinds of excuses while we watch junk on TV instead? God will deal with the sins of humanity, as he will deal with us with our unfaithfulness. Saved? Yes, perhaps; but as the book of James says, what good is it to know Him and not grow in Him or make Him known?

The Plan to Know His Word Better

So, do you want to know His Word better? Below are some ideas that I have learned and put into practice that have helped me greatly. This is not just for study, sermon preparation, or for a long, drawn out *exegetical* analysis. (We have those too on our *How to study the Bible* Channel ([How To Study The Bible](#)), but this plan will help you prepare to walk with Christ more closely, And, if you are a leader, you can lead for His glory; if you are a pastor, you can teach his Word better, because you will know it better and even know who Caleb is and how we can be like Him too.

The Simplest Way to Learn the Bible!

I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands.
Psalm 119:10

(This process would fall in the first steps of any *exegetical* or *inductive* approach.)

- **The Basic “win-win” plan:** If you just take a Bible book, any one, such as Matthew and read it every day for a month, you will know it beyond measure! Then, keep applying this approach to each Book, one at a time.
- **The Basic “easy” plan:** Listen to your book on tape or MP3 several times—as you drive, at a break when you get up, before you go to bed, as you shop, etc.
- **The Basic “synergistic” Plan; Do Both!** I have found this is the simplest, easiest way to learn and know the Bible!

Keep this in mind: The more you expose yourself to His Word, the more He will expose His Word to you! And, this can be done in less time than it takes to watch a half hour TV show! You will have far more knowledge of His Word and be more active and involved in our Lord than perhaps 90% of Christians who usually just “pew sit” and do nothing with their faith. What will you do?

God does not need us, but He does desire to use us. We are the instruments and means He uses to make His voice heard and known. Yes, the Spirit goes before us, but we are the examples and the truth-tellers of His Word and precepts. We are to know His Word and His precepts first; they must go deep and break us free of our sin so we can bathe in His love. For us, Christian leaders and pastors, it is essential that our words match our beliefs and our behaviors match our convictions. It does no good to give a sermon or lead a church when we are not impacted by the words we say or do not walk in the direction that we ask others to take.

The Steps to Know His Word Better

I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.
Psalm 119:11

- **Step one: Get your materials.** You will need a good, easy-to-read translation. I recommend the *New Living Translation* (this is not for study, it is a good paraphrase for getting to know the Bible, the idea behind this curriculum) and a set of tapes or CDs too. Once you get to know the Bible and become more at ease, then switch to a better translation such as the *New King James* or *New English Standard Version*, or the *NASB*, *NIV* or *KJV*.
- **Step two: Set your time and place.** Find a quiet place so you can be clear of distracting thoughts and desires! Engaging His Word is all about the Supremacy and Centrality of Christ; He is our Lord and the center of Scripture. Thus, we must come before God with our eagerness and expectancy. This is not to be a chore; it is fellowship with the Creator of the universe, and what better time could there be!

To be consistent in reading and listening to the Bible regularly, we must make time for it and keep it up—not make excuses and keep that up.

- **Step three: Select the Book** that you wish to learn about, and then read it with a passion to want to know Him and His precepts better. It is best to start with the New Testament before you venture into the Old Testament.
- **Step four: Read it.** Start with Matthew and read it through in one sitting at least once. If this is your first time, you may want to start with John and/or just plow through the New Testament.
- **Step five: Play it and Listen.** After you read it, listen to it. It is best to listen to an entire book at one sitting. You can play your Bible Book over every day, and in a month, you will know it well. I also suggest you listen through the entire Bible one book at a time; this will take you two months (smaller books you can double or triple up on).

Imagine that you can know God's most precious Word with little effort. If you do this every day, you will have listened to His entire Word in a month or two; just let the tape play and allow his Spirit to come into you.

- **Step Five: Discover what our Lord has to say.** The easy part is to read and listen; the hard part is to apply it. It is usually not what the Bible says that troubles Christians; it is being convicted of His precepts. We must be willing to not only read, but also to obey God's decrees! It is not about you, it is about God! Make it your choice and work hard with your will surrendered to His! To start to learn more, use the Basic Inductive process by asking the text some questions! You can also use this method to memorize portions of Scripture.

Thoughts to Consider

In God's eyes, it is far more important that we do something right rather than we just do something, even what is good, and even service to Him.

Why should we do this—learn His Word? Because, if we want to be mature and growing Christians—real Christians, and not just pew-sitters and noise—we must get to know Him more! God deserves our trust and submission, for there is no other way to lead a triumphant, purposeful, meaningful, and mature Christian life filled with Fruit and impact. Thus, we must see that God's Word and the precepts it contains are true, relevant, authoritative, and binding; then, we can also see its personal significance, veracity, importance, power, impact, and application upon us and those around us.

This is convicting and will move us beyond what we think we can do and/or where we can go; this bitterness can either be a barrier we refuse to

trespass, or an obstacle we take as a challenge to go deeper and further with what Christ has for us. Look at it this way; we are called to Fruit and Love, and to operate in His call and principles with joy. When we impact others with His Gospel, it will cause some resentment in them—perhaps even persecution. When we speak out against the sins of others, they will hate us. But, we must set the example and tell His Truth in love to others even when they do not want to hear it. Our experiences and actions will give us both sweetness and bitterness from others. If we only see the bitterness, we will gain little, and the sweetness will not last. If we refuse, the journey we undertake may become bitter by our own actions, whereas we could have had the sweetness of trusting and obeying Him (Psalm 119:103; Jer. 15:16; Ezek. 3:1-11; 1 Thess. 2:13).

Study with proper sense of our ultimate reality, giving Christ Glory!

Praise be to you, O LORD; teach me your decrees. Psalm 119:12

1. God, being God, is to be the most important Person in our lives, honored, listened to, known, and worshipped.
2. God, being God, should have the primary place in our lives, as we recognize, act with faith, and serve Him with joy.
3. God, being God, is to be trusted, loved, and enjoyed.
4. God, being God, wants to be greater in your life. The greater He is in you, the greater will be your life, your purpose, your opportunities, and your blessings!

If you do these steps, you will find that you will not be bored at all. So, fall in love with His Word! Have the appetite, as it was better than your favorite meal! Do not let it be just a duty! The love will increase as we increase in our effort and study!

Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. Psalm 119:18

Who was my great uncle? It was Francis Schaeffer, philosopher, pastor, writer, and theologian extraordinaire. I had the pleasure of many years of personal, intense mentoring from him, as he lived with my family when he was in town (he lived in Switzerland when I was growing up in Monterey, California) and watched over my mother and me in very tough times. I undertook many long drives and overnight trips with him, as well as conversations and debate as I accompanied him. But, as great an opportunity as this was, it was also tragic. At the time, I was not a committed Christian; I was very involved in new age cults as a youth and even after becoming a Christian. While in high school in the 70s after I started teaching seminars and being a youth minister by his challenge and mentorship. Yet, I was very much a liberal. I fought him more than I listened. I was always looking for the easy way out and never wanted to be convicted of genuine truth. A year after his death in the mid 80s, I recommitted my life to Christ and took the long hard road to biblical literacy and I even went to

seminary. I have studied and studied, embarked on many degrees and services for our Lord and now seek to always learn, wishing my great-uncle were still here guiding me, because this time I would listen. It is my hope you do not embark on foolishness such as I did and miss crucial opportunities; rather, seek Him first and undertake His call and mission to know His Bible! And, by the way, we may not have a great theologian or a famous mentor at our disposal, but we do have something far greater, God's Word; if we just get to know it, we will get to know Him. Think how much more your life will be a straightforward, content Christian life with meaning and purpose!

So, I challenge you to set aside time each day at the time you are most alert and able to go before your Creator and Redeemer; then, read and listen to His Word.

Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors. Psalm 119:24

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