

Sanctification through Scripture

How to Understand and Apply God's Word

1. What is God's Word?

- God's Word is God's Word

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17 - "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."
- This may seem like an obvious point, but it's important that we recognize why God's Word is so important.
- There has only ever been one being whose words are powerful enough to immediately and without mediation create that which did not previously exist.
- That same power, the power of God, is what gives the Bible its beauty, efficacy, and authority.
- When you read God's Word, understand that you are partaking of the very same wisdom that created the entire universe and all that is within it!

- God's Word is Truth

- John 17:17 - "Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth."
- God cannot lie, therefore, His Word cannot be incorrect, incomplete, untrustworthy, errant, or false.
- It is and always will be THE trustworthy, complete, accurate, infallible, unimpeachable source of absolute Truth.
- In a world where truth has become subjective, fluid, negotiable, and irrelevant, God's Word is Truth and it NEVER changes. It is the ROCK upon which we stand (see Matthew 7:24-27).

- God's Word is Life

- 2 Timothy 3:14-15 - "But you, continue in the things you learned and became convinced of, knowing from whom you learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."
- The revelation of God is what enables souls to be saved. The enlightening of the Holy Spirit enables the faith that leads to salvation and the Word of God deepens our understanding of who He is, what He demands of us, how we can obey His commands, and the future hope we have in Him.

- God's Word is Light

- Psalm 119:105 - "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."
- God's Word is described in Scripture as that which enlightens, exposes, guides, and makes wise.
- God's Word imparts the wisdom to understand, discern, and apply Truth to our lives.

- Without God's Word, we would be stumbling around in the dark, enslaved to and burdened by the wickedness of sin, and unable to discern the Truth.

2. What does God's Word do?

- Reveals God's character

- Acts 17: 24-25 - "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things."
- The Bible provides clarity and exactness regarding the character and will of God.
- The Bible tells us:
 - Who God is (Exodus 3:14a; John 1:1-5)
 - What He loves and hates (Psalm 37:28; John 3:16; Proverbs 6:16-19)
 - What He commands of us (Exodus 20:1-17; Matthew 22: 35-40)
 - What His design is for life and living (1 Thessalonians 5:12-24)
 - What He has done and is doing (Jeremiah 10:12; Hebrews 9:15)
 - How He feels about and interacts with us (Ephesians 2:4-5; Psalm 46:1)
 - How we are to approach Him (James 4:10; Job 40:13-31; Matthew 11:28-30)
 - How He deals with sin (Galatians 5:19-21; John 3:17)
 - How He deals with obedience (Luke 11:28; John 15:10-11)

- Reveals the Gospel

- Romans 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."
- The Romans Road:
 - Romans 3:10 - "as it is written, 'there is none righteous, not even one.'"
 - Romans 3:23 - "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."
 - Romans 5:8 - "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."
 - Romans 6:23 - "For the wages of sin is death, but the gracious gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."
 - Romans 10:9 - "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."
 - Romans 10:13 - "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

- Instructs

- Psalm 32: 8 - "I will give you insight and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you."

- Judges

- Hebrews 4:12 - "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."

- Convicts

- Romans 3:19-20 - “Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”

- Corrects

- Hebrews 12:6 - “For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

- Equips

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17 - “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

- Satisfies

- Psalm 19: 7-11 - “The law of Yahweh is [f]perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of Yahweh is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of Yahweh are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of Yahweh is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of Yahweh is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of Yahweh are true; they are righteous altogether. *They are* more desirable than gold, even more than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them Your slave is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.”

- Encourages

- Romans 15:4 - “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through the perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

3. **What are we to do with God's Word?**

- Hear/Read it

- Romans 10:17 - “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”

- Seek it

- Psalm 119:10 - “With all my heart I have sought You; do not let me stray from Your commandments.”

- Let it dwell within us

- Colossians 3:16a - “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...”

- Memorize it

- Proverbs 7:2-3 - “Keep my commandments and live, and my law as the apple of your eye. Bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart.”

- Meditate on it

- Joshua 1:8a - “This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night...”

- Rely on it

- Psalm 119: 11 - “Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You.”

- Obey it
 - James 1:22 - "But become doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves."
- Teach it
 - 2 Timothy 3:16-17 - "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

4. How do we understand God's Word?

- Pray for understanding
 - Psalm 24:4-5 - "Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long."
 - Romans 119:18 - "Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law."
- Decide how to approach it
 - We have an entire lifetime of reading and studying God's Word and everyone's brain learns things differently.
 - Choosing how to study God's Word requires assessment of the following considerations:
 - How do you learn best?
 - When is your mind most sharp?
 - What recurring struggles tempt you away from feasting on God's Word?
 - What are the constraints of your current schedule?
 - Is your goal breath or depth, or a combination of both?
 - Are you more of a planner or someone who is more spontaneous?
 - What types of study do you enjoy?
 - What system is most realistic for you given your answers to all of the above questions?
 - Once you have a good grasp on how you learn and what your schedule realistically permits, choose a method of study that best suits your learning style and the current logistics of your life. Some examples of bible study programs are:
 - Read through the Bible in a year
 - Dr. Horner's Bible Reading System
 - Guided book study (example: John MacArthur studies by Harper Christian Resources; bible studies from The Daily Grace Co.)
 - Self-led book study (verse by verse, with study helps such as study-bibles, bible dictionaries, commentaries, and cross-references)
 - Topical theology books such as Essential Christian Doctrine: A Handbook on Biblical Truth (edited by John MacArthur)
 - None of the study systems above is better than the other. Scripture does not dictate a specific way we must study God's Word.
 - What Scripture does tell is that we "shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

- We are commanded to feast on God's word regularly. The practical outworking of how we accomplish that will differ from person to person, but it must be a regular and frequent part of the lives of all believers.
- Spend time learning about it's
 - Context
 - A good study bible can tell you: WHO is was written by and for, under WHAT circumstances it was written, WHERE it was written, WHEN it was written, and WHY it was written
 - Meaning
 - Original languages (Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic): resources like the Keyword Study Bible and Strong's Exhaustive Concordance can help you understand the words you are reading in their original languages.
 - Commentaries (Insights from trustworthy and biblically sound men of God who help us understand God's Word more comprehensively. Reliable commentators are: John MacArthur, Charles Spurgeon, and Matthew Henry).
 - Sermons (faithful exposition of God's Word which provides context, insight, and instruction from godly men who have dedicated their lives to understanding and applying God's Word. Reliable preachers with accessible sermons are: John MacArthur, RC Sproul, Alex Montoya, Voddie Bauchum, Paul Washer, Scot Ardavanis, and a couple of up-and-coming preachers named Costi Hinn and Johnny Ardavanis.)
 - Impact
 - God's word is a tremendous encouragement to those who have come before us! There are countless biographies that show us how God has carried His people through some of the toughest trials known to man. We can read these accounts and be encouraged by them!
 - Some great sources for encouragement from precious saints are: Torchlighters, The Hiding Place, the biographies of George Mueller, Charles Spurgeon, Johnathan Edwards, Corrie Ten Boom, and Jonnie Erickson Tada.
- Make a plan for putting it into action (see next point)
- Make a plan for the times when your heart is prone to wander
 - There will invariably come times in life when you are tempted to abandon your reliance on God's Word. Some things that may draw you away from your first love are:
 - Busy schedules
 - Unforeseen emergencies/illnesses
 - Exhaustion
 - Overwhelm/confusion
 - Discontentment
 - Outright rebellion
 - When these times come, you must have a plan in place for how you will overcome the temptation to deprioritize the reading and studying of God's word. Some suggestions are:

- Reduce deeper systems of study to something more manageable for a short period of time (example: pick just one study help to focus on for the day, instead of multiple).
- Read or listen to one Psalm and one Proverb per day
- Listen to God's Word via audio recording while you are driving or doing dishes or making dinner (free on ESV.org!!). Make sure to train your mind not to wander!
- Focus on one catechism question and its proof text per day

5. How do we apply God's Word?

- Pray for the Spirit's enabling
 - Ezekiel 36:27 - "And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."
- Every time you read/hear God's Word, ask these two questions:
 - What is this passage teaching me about the character of God?
 - What is this passage revealing about the attributes, heart, or will of God?
 - Purpose to worship God for the Truth about His character that has been revealed in His Word!
 - Based on what the Bible has revealed about God's character, how are we to respond? The Truths about God's character that are found in His Word should change our:
 - **Thoughts:** what Truth has God's Word revealed in this passage? Commit to thinking that Truth, not your own or what the world calls truth.
 - **Words:** what words will you choose to use in light of this Truth? How do you need to adjust your language choices, tone, timing, and even silence to implement God's Truth in the way you speak?
 - **Actions:** what immediate changes do you need to make to implement God's Truth into your life? Are you sinning in hidden ways? Stop! Are you being unkind toward others? Stop! Are you being lazy or unfaithful or any other thing God's Word instructs us not to be? Stop! As James 4:7-8 says, "Be subject therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded."
 - WRITE DOWN HOW YOU WILL APPLY GOD'S WORD! Writing it down is a form of personal accountability. Instead of just wishing/hoping for change, map out real, practical steps you will take and then take them!

6. Encouragement for the times you feel:

- Like a Failure
 - You cannot will yourself sanctified. It is entirely a work of the Holy Spirit through the renewal of the mind as we read and study God's Word.
 - John 14:26 - "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."
 - Romans 12:12 - "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."

- Pray for the humility to rely on God for sanctification and the wisdom to put His Word into action.

- Overwhelmed

- You may spend time planning out the *perfect* system of study. It's aligns perfectly with how you learn, is engaging and thorough, and realistically takes your life's practical logistics into consideration.
- All this and you can STILL feel overwhelmed by your time in God's Word.
- The lexicon leads to more and more words that need to be looked up. The cross-reference spiral into deeper and deeper theological concepts. Trusted commentaries lead to more and more considerations that you really want to study.
- Before you know it, you're growing white hairs and wondering how you will EVER be able to understand John 1:1.
- This may sound like a bad thing, but it's not, I promise!
- The beauty of God's Word is that the more you study it, the more there is to study.
- If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed and like you can't just even one study goal/plan completed, take a deep breath and a step back and, whatever you do, DON'T GIVE UP!
- Instead, make adjustments. Implement mental and logistical boundaries for the sake of not getting discouraged. By way of example: if a verse has 7 cross-references, choose to focus on only two of them during today's study time and disperse the other 5 cross-references throughout the rest of the week. It may require a study-plan adjustment or even an overhaul, but that's ok!
- There's nothing wrong with tweaking your study plan until it enables you to feast on all the amazing Truths in God's Word without it causing you to become paralyzed with indecision.
- You don't have to marry your current study system. Do what works for right now and make adjustments as needed!

- Confused

- You will invariably come across passages that generate more questions than answers. Some passages may perplex and bewilder you. This is normal.
- When you come across passages like this, operate under a very important assumption: Lack of understanding is a failing of our finite minds, not a failing on the part of our infinite God.
- Be honest with the Lord about your confusion, ask Him to grant you clarity, and rest in Him even if you don't receive it. Sometimes lessons take days, weeks, months to learn. And sometimes, we never get an answer that feels complete. That not only ok, its a perfect opportunity to practice FAITH! God is trustworthy and His Word is Truth. We may not fully understand it, but we can trust it!