

STUDYING THE BIBLE

LESSON 1 - DEVOTIONAL TIME

Proverbs 8:32-36 (New International Version, ©2010)

"Now then, my daughters, listen to me; blessed are those who keep my ways. Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not disregard it. Blessed are those who listen to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway. For those who find me find life and receive favor from the LORD. But those who fail to find me harm themselves."

Don't be foolish:

Luke 12:21 reminds us: A person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.

Scripture Divinely Inspired:

2 Peter 1:20 & 21 "Scripture did not come from those who wrote it because they wanted to prophesy, it was the Holy Spirit who moved the prophets to speak from God." It is not any book. It was inspired by God and given to you so that there would be no doubt in your mind of God's plan of salvation and the working out of that salvation in your life.

Primary concern and goal:

Luke 12:30 – God will give you all you need everyday if you make the Kingdom of God your primary concern.

Find blessing:

Luke 11:38 "Blessed are all who hear the word of God and put it into practice."

Pay Attention:

Luke 8:18 "Be sure you pay attention to what you hear. To those who are open to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But to those who are not listening (paying attention) even what they think they have will be taken away from them."

Do what it says:

I Peter 2:8 "People stumble because they do not listen to God's word and obey it."

Crave – Don't be passive:

I Peter 2:2 –"**You must** crave pure spiritual milk so that you can grow into the fullness of your salvation. Cry out for this nourishment as a baby cries for milk, now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness."

Word is to become a part of us and make us wise.

Colossians 3:16 "Let the words of Christ, in all their richness, live in your hearts and make you wise. Use his words to teach and counsel each other."

Today You must listen to His Voice

Hebrews Chapter 3 exhorts by saying, "**Today you must listen to His voice.** Don't harden your hearts against Him as Israel did. Israel refused to do what I told them and they never entered my place of rest. So be careful, dear sisters, Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God. You must warn each other every day, as long as it is call "today", so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God. Never forget you must listen to His voice.

So the question arises how do we listen to Him? God speaks everyday to us primarily through His Word and it the Word that tests all other forms of communication we receive (circumstances, other people, dreams, visions, that still small voice inside). Everything we hear and think to be God must be measured by His Word. If we don't know the Word, we can be lead astray by all the voices calling out to us.

It is powerful

Hebrews 4:12 – tells us that the word of God is full of living power and we need that power everyday to be victorious. It is sharper than the sharpest knife, cutting deep into our innermost thoughts and desires (showing us what is God and what is not). It exposes us for what we really are (what is of the flesh and what is of the Spirit). So would you agree that we need this everyday in our lives?

That is what makes this study so exciting; you have the opportunity to find your niche (the area that you feel comfortable with in studying his Word). The question is not do I need to study? The questions should be how am I going to study to get to know the Word better? It is with great enthusiasm that I encourage you to make the Word of God a living part of your life. For without it, your heart will harden and you will never enter the place of rest that God has waiting for you.

Study is continual

The Bible teaches us that we cannot be disciples of Jesus Christ if we do not have a regular intake of the Word of God. Jesus said to his followers, "**IF** you continue in my word, **then** you are my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. If you look back through the history of the Christian church, you will find that the common denominator of every great man and woman of God was that they spent consistent, regular time with the Lord in prayer and in the Word. It is called relationship. There are more Bibles available than ever before but most people are ignorant of what the Scriptures say. We live in a day of biblical illiteracy, even among the people of God.

This morning we are going to talk about the devotional method of Bible Study. The purpose of all study is to know God better, hear his voice and respond to what he says. In the weeks to come we will talk about many other ways to enhance our study but devotional study speaks of relationship to me. A few years ago as I began to study and read I realized that although I talked a lot about God, we did not have an intimate relationship. I remember singing, I am a friend of God and feeling that I wanted to be friends with God but we didn't have the kind of relationship I had with my girlfriends. Thus began a quest to begin to establish an intimate relationship with the Lord and that is when everything in my life changed dramatically.

I made knowing God the top priority in my life and as a result He began to speak in ways that I am still amazed at today. I love the Word, I love my time with the Lord and I set my schedule so that my day revolves around my time with Him. Lest you think I have this down and don't have failures, let me assure you some days are easier than others and there are days I get sidetracked but they have become few and far between.

Let's talk for a minute about the book of Haggai because it presents an example of the challenges we still face today- balancing our lives. Let me set the stage for you. There are a group of Jewish exiles who choose to return to Jerusalem from captivity in Babylonia. The people are confronted by a city in shambles, including the glorious structure that was once Solomon's Temple. They are very excited when they get there and work really hard but like life today, when hard work and opposition arise their enthusiasm dwindles and they get caught up in just everyday survival. Haggai arrives on the scene and it has been 16 years since the Jews have worked on the Temple and they are busy pursuing building bigger and better houses. Everything has become about them.

Haggai doesn't mince words, He tells them, "Why are you living in luxurious house while God's house lies in ruins? Consider how things are going for you! You have planted much but harvested little. You have food to eat, but not enough to fill you up. You have wine, to drink, but not enough to satisfy your thirst. You have clothing to wear, but not enough to keep you warm. Your wages disappear as though you were putting them in pockets filled with holes. Now go up into the hills, bring down timber and rebuild the Lord's house. You hoped for rich harvests, but they are poor. And when you brought your harvest home, I blew it away. Why? Because my house lies in ruins, says the Lord Almighty, while you are all busy building your own fine houses. That is why the heavens have withheld the dews and the earth has withheld its crops. I have called for a drought on your fields and hills- a drought to wither the grain and grapes and all your other crops, a drought to starve both you and your cattle and to ruin everything you have worked so hard to get."

So the people hear the message from Lord through Haggai. They obey the message and worship the Lord in earnest. They changed their heart from the things of the world to the things of God. We know it was not easy because in Chapter 2 the Lord encourages them by saying, "Take courage and work, for I am with you." After they laid the foundation of the temple, the Lord gives this word, "I am giving you a promise now while the seed is still in the barn, before you have harvested your grain and before the grapevine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have produced their crops. From this day onward I will bless you. Once they got their priorities right God blessed them.

So I encourage you today if the things of the world have crowded out your relationship with God – hear the word of the Lord. It will take work to get your priorities back in order but the Lord promises to be with you and bless you if you are obedient.

So today, we have to decide who will have priority in our lives. Actively or passively we each make the decision everyday. **We tend think we can be casual in our**

relationship with God but we cannot. Normal Christian life is that as we take time to read his word and pray (talk to Him) everyday.

The word must become a part of our lives. You cannot live on my revelation and I cannot live on yours. Relationship is based on personal communication (not what has happened in my life, not what Andy preaches – although all of these are good and edifying); no one can have a relationship for you. Only you can do that. You may be touched emotionally and God does speak to us through others but real change comes from one-on-one communication/revelation from God.

So lets summarize a few reasons why the Word has to be primary in our life:

- It is the way we will get to know God personally
- We need daily fellowship with God to grow and be healthy spiritually
- It is the way we learn to know His voice
- It directs our paths and lights our way
- It keeps us from being deceived
- It is our source of strength
- It is our weapon against the devil
- It is God's directive for our life
- It is powerful
- It purifies our lives
- It was written with purpose (our love letter from God)
- It gives hope
- It warns of things that can harm us
- We are commanded to study it
- Absolutely trustworthy
- It gives knowledge of eternal life (how to get it and how to live it)
- It is our spiritual food – without partaking we experience malnutrition.
- Those who read it and respond to it are blessed
- We give devotion to God and gain delight in His presence

So now you can begin to understand why the devil is so busy – trying to make all the unimportant things in our lives become the most important. We must remember and live in the big picture because is there really anything more important than knowing the creator? Is it more important to watch our favorite television show than to know God? There is always time in our life for what is important. If you want to be a good mother, a good wife, a good friend, you will be in the Word. We have to remember that the number one priority in our lives has to be God and knowing God takes time.

Obligation vs. Privilege

The devil wants obligation to be the driving force in our lives, "you have to do this" because it is true we do have to do it. But the devil always takes the truth and twists it into an oppressive obligation and we forget what a privilege has been given to us.

We can approach our devotional time with different attitudes and attitude is everything in our success.

(1) Wow, I get to listen and talk to God. In obedience you begin to work and build an intimate relationship with God where you listen to what He has to say (the Word) and you share your needs, wants and desires (prayer). It is a **process** where you develop a friendship and eventually He becomes your best friend. Before long you can't wait for those times of fellowship because there is nothing in life like hearing from the King. Spending time with those you love and cherish can be hard work but you wouldn't trade it for anything.

(2) Obligation – you can read the word and add it to the list of dreaded chores. You read it but rarely does God speak to you or does it make a difference in your life. You feel pretty self righteous when asked about a devotional time because you DO IT and it seems most people are just doing it because not too many are excited about what's happening. But when obligation becomes love, what you must do leaves the category of obligation and becomes your hearts desires.

(3) No – you just can't make time in your life. And you've decided it is just not worth the effort. Life is too busy, when the kid's get in bed you want to just veg in front of the television and you don't want anyone to bother you. You've tried it and it just didn't work for you. Really it is highly overrated and life is just too exhausting and adding one more thing to your schedule takes too much effort.

There is nothing better than relationship. How do you feel when you and your husband are just existing in the same house? How do you feel when you make time for each other- a time where you talk and really share your hearts?

So where do we start? I am going to give you some guidelines but we each have different personalities and everyone's time with God will be a little different.

Reading devotionally is the process of reflecting on a few verses or a passage and making personal application. We are simply endeavoring to encounter God on the holy ground of His word by coming into His presence to listen and talk with Him and then putting into practice what He says.

The absolute best method of studying the Bible is simply to read it prayerfully, every day, paying close attention to obey what it says. Meditate on the Scriptures and don't stop reading until they have somehow worked the words, message, truth, and revelation of Jesus into the very soul of your being. Nothing extraordinary about that, really, studying the Bible is wonderfully simple. Learn to enjoy God and His Word and to apply its truth and you will always find what you seek—His will for your life!

It has been rightly said that if we fail to plan we plan to fail. This is true when it comes to Bible study too. If you have a desire to study the Bible but don't have a plan, you will fail. But the good news is this: you have many plans to choose from! When it comes to methods for studying the Bible, variety is the spice of life and during this study you will have the opportunity to find what works for you.

HOW TO ESTABLISH A TIME WITH GOD

1. **Have a plan** but be flexible. Be creative. Ask for help after all you are dealing with the Creator of the universe. As with all plans there will be exceptions (you are sick, your baby is sick, etc) but live in the plan not the exception.
 - ❑ **Prayer** is your greatest tool in understanding the scriptures so ask God to speak to you before you begin. Remember prayer is just your turn talking to God.
 - ❑ **Set a specific time** - If you have small children your plan may change every day but try to set a specific time each day. For most people morning seems to be the best time but there is no mold. In Jesus' life he rose both early and late to meet and pray with the Father. Whatever time you pick try to be consistent. Schedule it on your calendar and keep your appointment with God. (When your children are older establish a reading time for them in their room and use this time for your study. As they get older it may be sitting in the car waiting for soccer practice to end). Just make your time while you are still coherent and can hear.
 - ❑ **Choose a special place.** A location where you can be alone, where it is quiet and where you will not be disturbed or interrupted. A place where you are comfortable- but not too comfortable.
 - If you commute get the Bible on CD or listen to Christian Radio. Spend some of that time talking to the Lord and some quiet time just listening. Commit your day to God and ask Him to speak to your heart.
 - If you work use your lunch hour to spend time with the Lord reading and praying.
 - Don't use work or small children as an excuse. There are enough hours in a day and you live in disobedience if you ignore his word.
 - ❑ **Have a reading plan.** Read through the New Testament or through a book in the Bible. You might want to get a Bible that allows you to read through the entire Bible in a year. One of my favorites is **The Daily Walk Bible** with 365 Devotional helps that guide you through the Bible and help you understand the passage. (If it takes you 2 or 3 years don't get discouraged.) Depending on your season of life you may only get through a chapter a day or a few verses. Don't get frustrated, God sees your heart and will help you. He will reward your faithfulness. I had a friend call me yesterday who has been sick off and on for many years. She picked up her Bible and was only able to read two words, "I will". It changed her day!
 - ❑ Keep a Bible in your car/purse with your prayer list so you can read or pray when time permits for those days that are crazy. If you are new to studying the Bible, don't begin in the Old Testament.

- ❑ **Have a time to pray and pray with purpose.** I have a prayer book that I keep in my purse and a prayer list with my journal. I have divided mine to categories. Personal Prayers, Praise and Thanksgiving, Intercession (others I pray for). I do that because there are certain scriptures I want to pray, people I want to remember, and I need reminders in worship and thanksgiving. Ask God to give you wisdom as you pray (how to pray for people and circumstances). We want to move past God bless the world and everyone in it. Really life with God is to be a continual conversation (prayer) but we need those times where He has our undivided attention.
- ❑ **How much time is enough.** If you have never had a quiet time, start with 10 minutes and let it grow naturally. The more you develop the relationship, it won't be about time. Emphasize quality, not quantity of time. Remember this is about establishing an intimate relationship with God of the universe.

TO SUMMARIZE:

- ❑ Relax and quiet your soul.
- ❑ Start with prayer and ask God to speak to you through his word. You have the Holy Spirit in you and one of His jobs is to reveal the word to you. "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law." If you know of any sin, be sure to confess that first because sin will keep you from hearing God. "Search me, O God, and know my heart. reveal any unclean thing in my life."
- ❑ Choose where you are going to start reading and try to read at least a chapter so that you don't take things out of context. Don't be in a hurry. If you have time, read the passage twice.
- ❑ Write out what you want to remember and/or what you felt God spoke to you (may be a verse that just stood out to you, brought comfort/hope to a situation, a promise, something He wants you to change) Writing it down will enable you to remember what God revealed to you. When God speaks you need to understand the enormity of what has just taken place and reverence the moment – that the God of the universe took the time to talk to you and me is beyond my comprehension.
- ❑ Think about what you read and how you can put it into practice today.
- ❑ Try to memorize special verses. Hiding the Word in your heart is a good thing and the Lord will use that Word in your heart to help you and others. My daughter puts sticky notes with scripture on her mirror to look at as she gets ready, and in front of the sink as she does dishes. Use your imagination and find ways to incorporate the word in the mundane things of life (like dishes).
- ❑ We will talk about Study tools as we go on in this study. For now all you need is a Bible that you can understand. Don't make it too difficult or you will give up.
- ❑ There may be times when you may read a devotional but try to make it an addition not a replacement for the Word. The Bible is your sword and nothing can ever take its place in your life.

- ❑ Spend time in prayer – just talking to God about your day, your desires, your need of His power to help you through the day, your family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, etc. And remember who you are talking to and enter into worship- giving God the recognition he deserves. Praise Him for his greatness, power, majesty and strength. Repent of any sin, especially any revelation of sin from your reading that day.
- ❑ Don't forget to say thank you for all He has done.
- ❑ Vary your plan from time to time. Don't fall into the trap of performing a method – remember this is about relationship and getting to know Christ.
- ❑ I want to add this because many people today have learning disabilities and reading is difficult. If that is the case in your life and reading is difficult, get an audio Bible or get with a friend and read together. Ask God to help you and show you ways to bring the Word into your life. My husband and I read the Word together every morning. I read and he listens.

Practical things to remember:

- If you plan to get up early, go to bed on time. Turn off that TV. Don't burn the candle at both ends.
- Be aware of quiet time "robbers". The TV is the number one culprit. Another robber is the attitude that quiet time is nice but not necessary. Surly God will understand that I just don't have time to spend with Him. That's like saying; surely my husband and children will understand I just don't have time for them.
- If you base you time with God on how you "feel", the devil will make sure you never feel like it.
- Some days may be uneventful and the scriptures hard to understand. Don't get discouraged. Remember you are there to establish a relationship and relationships take time.
- If you experience long periods of dryness be sure that there is no unconfessed sin in your life, and that you are taking care of yourself physically (not coming half asleep and exhausted to your time with God). Don't expect God to speak if you are always in a hurry (lets just get this over my favorite TV program is on). God's purpose for speaking is always action and we are to be a river that flows out to others.
- Get ready because Satan will send many distractions along the way. You may have to read and pray aloud, you may need to walk while praying. If you are reminded about something you need to do, write it down so you don't have to spend time worrying about forgetting it.
- Your biggest struggle will be to maintain you time with God. Satan's number one priority is to destroy this time because he wants you to remain powerless in your life. He will also try to condemn you if you miss a day and try to tell you to just give up. Don't listen to the father of lies.
- When we become busy somehow we think if we have to give up something it will be our time with God. Most Christians will say that their spiritual backsliding began as they began neglecting their quiet time.
- We can think spiritual activity is a substitute for our time with God. It is not!
- Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." Gal 6:9

Undoubtedly, at one time every Christian has resolved to never let a day go by without spending a portion of it in a focused, prayerful, and enjoyable time alone with God and His Word. However, many have found that after a few short weeks their resolve grows cold. They find their Bibles are going unread days at a time due to a myriad of excuses, such as, they got up too late, or had an unexpected early morning event, or a busy schedule, or even the fact that they have simply become apathetic. If this is you, I have one request: Please do not let anything defeat you in this most vital area of Christianity. Knowing God's Word is your secret to victory. Defeat here is defeat all across the board. Make your time with God in His Word the most non-negotiable area of your life and I promise you that you will enjoy the blessings of His presence. The possibilities of Bible study topics and methods are endless; and as the weeks go on you will have all kinds of new experiences. And remember, more important than knowing the Word of God is knowing the God of the Word. He is our exceeding great reward. Bible study helps you to know God; ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ. So please, love your God, love his Word, and talk to Him in prayer.

But today for those of you, who are just beginning, just concentrate of establishing a relationship- one that draws you each day into His presence. Read the word and talk to Him. Learn to enjoy His presence and become friends. Learn to recognize His voice and then with joy you will begin to put into practice what He speaks to you because you will have fallen in love and that love will press you to want to please Him.

Are you ready for an incredible journey? I am.

HOMEWORK

Spend your week setting up a plan. Select a time and place. Decide where you are going to begin reading. If reading the Bible is new, I suggest you start in the New Testament and it just so happens we are studying the book of Colossians. So start there and plan to go back to Matthew when we finish. Talking to God is critical so I suggest start a prayer book and begin listing the people you want to pray for on a consistent basis. If you need help, let me know.

Forty different writers wrote the Bible over the span of some 1500 years. These men and women lived centuries apart, in different areas of the ancient Middle East. The background of these people varied greatly from shepherds and fishermen, to doctors, lawyers, and kings. Parts of the Bible were written in three different languages: Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. There was no way for these people to gather and discuss what was being added to the Bible- it had to have been compiled under the divine direction of the Holy Spirit.

Though the Bible was written over sixteen centuries, it has one central theme- salvation through faith in Christ. It began by Moses in the lonely desert of Arabia and was finished by John on the lonely isle of Patmos, it is held together by a strong thread: God's passion and God's plan to save His children.

According to 2 Timothy 3:15 what is the purpose of the Holy Scriptures?

The Bible has endured through the centuries. It dares to tackle the toughest questions about life. But how do we use this Bible? What can we do to make the Bible real in our lives? The first step to understanding the Bible is to ask God to help us. According to John 14:26, whose help should we ask for? _____. See I Cor 2:10-16

The Bible requires effort and study. You don't have to be brilliant, but you must be willing to roll up your sleeves and search it to understand and correctly handle the word of truth. Read 2 Timothy 2:15 God wants you to do your _____. He wants you to handle the word _____.

Here is a practical point. Study the Bible a bit at a time. You don't sit down and eat 21 meals at a time. The body needs a steady diet to remain strong and so does the soul. When God sent food to His people in the wilderness, he sent the manna _____. See Exodus 16:14.

James 1:25 tell us another thing. Write the verse in your own words.

Psalm 119:130 "The entrance of your words gives _____; it give understanding to the _____. Don't concentrate on the things you don't understand, concentrate on responding to the things you understand and the more you study the Bible the more light will shine on those areas that are difficult.

Romans 15:4 "Everything that was written in the past was written to _____ us. Look for the purpose. Why is God sharing this story in the Bible? I think you will find, it is about people just like you and me that struggle with life and what happens when they know the Word and respond to it and what happens when they ignore the Word.

Philippians 2:14-16 "Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, woman of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation. Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you **hold firmly to the word of life.**"

In conclusion:

Proverbs 8:32-36 (New International Version, ©2010)

"Now then, my daughters, listen to me; blessed are those who keep my ways. Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not disregard it. Blessed are those who listen to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway. For those who find me find life and receive favor from the LORD. But those who fail to find me harm themselves."