

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 5/10/09 PM [\[1\]](#)

Series: "A Bible Centered Life"

Message: "The Importance of Reading and Studying the Word" 1 Peter 2:2

Series Overview: "A Bible Centered Life"

Part one: Hearing the Word

Part two: Reading and Studying the Word

Part three: Memorizing the Word

Part four: Praying the Word

We are so privileged to have our own copy of God's Word, and most of us hold several. I remember the story that John Bettig (missionary with TWR) told me several years ago about a man in the former USSR back in the 1980's. This pastor did NOT have a Bible. His people didn't either. He heard through the underground that Bibles were going to be distributed in a city 1000 miles away. With that hope alone, he made the long trip (by train?) to that city. His hopes were dashed when he learned he was too late. By the time he arrived all the Bibles had already been taken. He wept, "How can I return to my people. My people will be devastated if I return without a Bible!"

Do you treasure your Bible? I hope you do? How do you show that you treasure it? Not by putting it on the coffee table! But by using it! Reading it. Studying it. Sharing it with others.

Last week we began the series, *A Bible Centered Life*. We talked about the importance of *hearing the Word*, and looked at the example of the "noble" (openminded) people of Berea in Acts 17:11. We noticed what they did with both the verbal Word and the Written Word of God. They studied the Scriptures. Their study was marked by 3 characteristics: Diligence--"searched", Discipline--"daily", and Discernment--"whether those things were so".

This evening, we want to talk about the importance of *reading and studying the Word*. But first, there's another question we need to answer. Not "how" but "why"? Why study the Bible? We want to look at two key passages tonight. Then we'll actually lay out the basic steps involved in Bible study.

Why study the Bible? Let's turn to 1 Peter 2:2

1 Peter 2:2

V 2 "As newborn babes desire the pure milk of the word that ye may grow..."

But wait. Even before we can receive the benefits of the Word, we have to lay some groundwork. We looked at v 2. What does v 1 say must happen before we can experience the riches of God's Word?

V 1 "laying aside all malice..."

Malice is general evil. It has to go. So does guile ("fishhook"=deceit) and hypocrisies and envies

and evil speakings. In other words, before Bible study must come confession of sin. Frankly, people with known sin in their lives don't desire the Word!

Once the sin is gone, then what?

V 2 "Desire the pure milk of the Word..."

Howard Hendricks suggests 3 words that unpack the truth of v 2.

1. *Attitude*--"as newborn babes"

I agree with an observation made in John MacArthur's book "How to Study the Bible" (54). "A baby desires one thing--Milk! It doesn't care about anything else. It doesn't care what the color of the curtains or the carpet is. It doesn't care what the color of the booties or the nightgown it's wearing may be. It doesn't care what car you buy. A baby wants milk!"

A baby knows what it wants. Its desire is clear. And your infant will let you know in no uncertain terms that that desire must be met!

2. *Appetite*--"desire the pure milk of the Word"

Here's Peter's point. As Christians, we must crave the word of God the same way a baby craves milk. If you'll notice carefully, this is not a verse addressed to baby Christians. Its purpose is not to tell us to feed new Christians basic, elementary "milk" truths from the Word (though that's true). The point is this--As the baby grabs for the bottle, so the Christian should grab for the Book! (Hendricks)

Objection: "I don't get much out of the Bible. Why don't I have more of an appetite for the Word?"

Key: An appetite for the Bible is a cultivated taste.

Illust: I learned to like tomatoes and cucumbers in Israel...

But why crave the Word? Why study the Bible?

3. *Aim*--"that ye may grow by it"

Notice carefully. Here's the purpose of the Bible. That you may GROW. Not that you may KNOW. Certainly you can't grow without knowing. But lots of Christians know without growing. As Hendricks put it, "The Bible was not written to satisfy your curiosity but to help you conform to Christ's image. Not to make you a smarter sinner but to make you like the Savior. Not to fill your head with a collection of biblical facts but to transform your life." (19)

Illust: Growth chart on the wall--kids love to see how much...

I wonder what would happen if we put a growth chart up on the wall in the church?! Not a physical growth chart, but a spiritual growth chart. The issue is not whether we've arrived (we never will), but whether we're growing.

Key: The Bible is God's primary tool for our spiritual growth.

As we digest the Word of God, we grow. It reminds me of the children's song, "Read your Bible, pray every day...and you'll grow!"

"OK, I can see why I should study the Bible. So I can grow. But what do I look for when I'm reading?" Let's turn to a familiar passage in 2 Timothy 3.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Listen. Many Christians are frustrated when it comes to Bible study because they don't know what they're looking for. They get lost in the shuffle of all those strange words and places.

Illust: Story about the scientist with the flea (Hendricks, 192)

If we're going to enjoy our Bible study, we must know what to look for. Notice 2 Timothy 3:15-17.

V 15 "And that from a child you have known the holy scriptures...

V 16 "All scripture is given by inspiration (God breathed). *All* Scripture. As Hendricks says, "That includes II Chronicles!"

Notice the next phrase. "And it is PROFITABLE." Profitable for what? Four things: Doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction.

When I read God's Word I must look for 4 things, and ask myself 4 questions:

1. Doctrine--What should I believe? (thinking)
2. Reproof--What should I change? (behavior, attitudes)
3. Correction--How should I change?
4. Instruction--How should I live?

1. Doctrine--What should I believe? (thinking)

As you read the Bible, let it structure your thinking. That's crucial, because if your thinking is wrong your living will be wrong. What you believe will determine how you will behave.

So ask yourself, "What should I believe according to this verse?"

2. Reproof--What should I change? (behavior, attitudes)

Sometimes the Word of God will step on your toes. Ouch! If you read it sensitively, it will at times tap you on the shoulder and say, "Excuse me, but do you think you should have done that?!" Or, "Don't you think your attitude towards your wife needs a little adjusting, according to the verse you just read?"

So study the Bible with a teachable spirit, a willingness to change.

But the Bible doesn't leave you hanging...

3. Correction--How should I change?

The Bible contains tons of practical, "how to" verses. The Bible can tell you: How to fix your marriage, how to experience forgiveness, how to make things right with an offended neighbor, how to get your finances under control, how to... The Bible not only points out our faults, but shows us how to make the necessary corrections. Not just what to change, but how to do it.

Key: Of course that starts by coming to know Christ...

4. Instruction--How should I live?

The word "instruction" means "training." The Bible is God's training manual for right living. Do you want to know how to live life the way God intended it to be lived? Do you want to experience successful living. Here's the blueprint. Herein are the guidelines you need for life. Look for them as you read.

If the Bible can do all that, there are some things we ought to do with it, two of which I want to address next. We ought to *read* it and *study* it.

The Importance of Reading the Bible

The Bible is a story that's made up of shorter stories. It's a book comprised of books. How do you read a book? Do you merely open it up and jump into the middle of chapters and paragraphs? That's often the way we read the Bible. We ignore context. We ignore the fact that the Bible is a *book*. It's a story about what God has done to glorify Himself. It's the story of redemption.

Suggestions on how to read the Bible:

The Steps Involved in Bible Study:

Key: Effective Bible study requires a method.

Illust: It's like baking a cake...

There is no one perfect method for studying the Bible. Book studies are my favorite. Word studies. Doctrinal studies. Character studies. Bible reading programs. But there are certain steps that we must follow in each of these methods.

What steps should we follow when we study the Bible? Howard Hendricks, in his book "Living By the Book", suggests three...

See transparency: "Observation, Interpretation, Application" cartoon

Ask these key questions:

1. Observation--What do I see?
2. Interpretation--What does it mean?
3. Application--How does it work? How does it apply to my life?

Transp: Observation (Hend, 45)

Each step is critical. But perhaps the most neglected is the first. Observation. One of the common reasons people give for their frustration with the Bible is that it's boring. But may I suggest to you that the reason people think it's boring is because they don't know what to look for. They haven't learned how to observe.

Illust: True story of newsman whose wife swallowed his contacts!

Now that lady was not very observant! But lots of times we're not much more observant when we read the Bible. We gloss right over verses and say, "Man is this dry! It's supposed to be sweeter than honey but I feel like I'm chewing on a bale of dry hay."

Challenge: Learn to be observant when you read.

I must be a biblical detective if I want to succeed in Bible study. I'm on the lookout for clues. No detail is trivial. Every fact is important.

Illust: Story of scientist Agassiz

Practical Suggestions:

1. Have a notebook and paper handy (A "Quiet time" diary is good)
2. Have a good Study Bible

What is a study Bible? I would recommend one that has the following features: Large enough print, good quality paper (so you can mark in it), concordance, maps, headings and summaries, cross references, contemporary version (Caution: Be careful what Study Bible you buy. Remember the Bible is inspired and authoritative, but the footnotes are not!) Eg--NIV Schofield

3. Memorize the books of the Bible (it will save you time in long run)

Q: What kind of things should I look for as I study the Bible?

A: Look for: (start with Big picture, and then the closeup view)

1. Author and Occasion of Book (eg--Luke 1:1-4)
2. The Main Idea and Purpose of the Book (eg--John 20:31 "believe")

But sometimes the author doesn't tell us his purpose so plainly. So look for...

3. Key, repeated words (eg--I John "know" used 30+ times)
4. Structure of the Book (see how the parts fit together)
5. Literary form (poetry, parable, proverb, epistle, narrative)

Treat them differently.

Eg--Song of Solomon 4:1-2 Here's how Solomon describes his beloved, "Behold thou art fair, my love. Thou hast dove's eyes within thy locks; thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from Mount Gilead. Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn..."

So observe. Look for specific things.

Let's take Philippians as an example. You've been reading it daily since last Sunday.

Discuss: (write down)

1. Author and Occasion of the Book?
2. What topics are addressed in Philippians?
3. What do you think is the MAIN topic in the book?
4. What literary form is Philippians?

To do this week: Read Philippians a chapter a day. Underline key words. Look for a main, theme verse. State in a sentence why Paul wrote Philippians. Write down how each chapter contributes to the overall message.

^[1] This message has been adapted and developed from a series done at WBC in 1992 entitled, "How to Study the Bible."