

Digging Deeper

Welcome back to Walking with Purpose! How was your week of study in the Word of God? Did you discover some hidden treasure? If so, your small group will want to hear about it.

I heard of one young man getting ready to graduate from college. For many months he had admired a beautiful sports car in a dealer's showroom, and knowing that his father could well afford it, he told his father that car was *all* he wanted. As Graduation Day approached, the young man awaited signs that his father had purchased the car. Finally, on the morning of his graduation, his father called him into his private study.

His father first told him how proud he was to have such a fine son, and how much he loved him. He then handed his son a beautiful wrapped gift box. Curious, but somewhat disappointed, the young man opened the box and found a lovely, leather bound Bible, with his name embossed in gold.

Angrily, he raised his voice to his father and said, "With all your money you give me a Bible?" He stormed out of the house, leaving the Bible behind.

Many years passed and the young man was very successful in business. He had a beautiful home and wonderful family, but realized his father was very old and thought perhaps he should go to him. He had not seen him since that graduation day. But before he could make arrangements, he received a telegram telling him his father had passed away, and had willed all of his possessions to his son. He needed to come home immediately and take care of things.

When he arrived at his father's house, sudden sadness and regret filled his heart. He began to search through his father's important papers and saw the still new Bible, just as he had left it years ago. With tears, he opened the Bible and began to turn the pages. His father has carefully underlined a verse, Matthew 7:11, "And if ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father which is in heaven, give to those who ask Him?"

As he read those words, a car key dropped from the back of the Bible. It had a tag with the dealer's name...the same dealer who had the sports car he had desired. On the tag was the date of his graduation, and the words..."PAID IN FULL."



Fellowship

1. How has God's Word provided what you needed this week?
2. What were the biggest challenges you faced in setting aside time for study?



Discipleship

In a recent survey, it was discovered that about half of all adults listen to preaching or Bible teaching in a typical week. Although 1 out of 3 *read* the Bible during the week, only 1 out of 10 claims to *study* the Bible weekly...and less than 1 out of 25 devote themselves to *memorizing* at least one new Bible verse per week. One pastor constantly tells his congregation, "Don't *read* your Bible! *Study* it!"

Think of the treasure contained in God's Word that largely goes unused! By carelessly casting aside our love letter from God, we stand to lose far more than a *car*. Before we know it, laziness, a lack of interest or an undisciplined life has kept us from enjoying all God has for us!

DL Moody said: "The scriptures were not given for our information but our transformation." A Bible distributor named Billester visited a small hamlet in Poland shortly before World War II. He gave a Bible to a villager, who was converted by reading it. The new believer then passed the Book on to others. The cycle of conversions and sharing continued until 200 people had become believers through that one Bible.

When Billester returned in 1940, this group of Christians met together for a worship service in which he was to preach the Word. He normally asked for testimonies, but this time he suggested that several in the audience recite verses of Scripture. One man stood and said, "Perhaps we have misunderstood. Did you mean *verses* or *chapters*?"

These villagers had not memorized a few select verses of the Bible but whole *chapters* and *books*. Thirteen people knew Matthew, Luke, and half of Genesis. Another person had committed the Psalms to memory. That *single copy* of the Bible had done its work; transformed lives bore witness to the power of the Word.

So how does the Bible transform a life and how can it transform ours? Turn with me to Mark 4, verses 1-20 as we read it together. "Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on

the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: 'Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times.' Then Jesus said, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear.' When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. He told them, 'The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, "they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!"' Then Jesus said to them, 'Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop – thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown.'"

In all of the cases in this passage, the Word was sown...yet in only **one** did it truly transform a life. In the first scenario, the seed fell on rocky places and the birds ate it up. It had no root. Satan was able to steal it away since it hadn't gone more than skin deep. The Word fell, but wasn't internalized.

I've always loved the story about a preacher who stood on the street corner preaching to anyone who would listen. A man approached him who looked like he had lived on the street forever. "Can I help you" asked the preacher. "Actually, I think you **can**," said the homeless man. "Would you like me to tell you about Jesus?" "No." "Would you like me to pray for you?" "No." The preacher was getting confused and a bit frustrated, so said: "If you don't want me to tell you about Jesus, and you don't want me to pray with you, how can I help you?" "You can give me your Bible." "Why would you want my Bible if you have no interest in knowing more about Jesus?" The man said, "Well, I noticed that the pages of your Bible are very thin; I can use the pages to wrap my cigarettes." Wisdom came suddenly to the preacher, who said, "I'll give you the Bible, if you will agree to read each page before you smoke it." He agreed, took his new Bible, and left. The preacher thought he had seen the last of the man, but figured he could get another Bible easily enough. Several months passed, and the preacher was on the street corner once again. A man came up to him dressed in a three piece suit. "You don't know me, do you?" asked the man. "No. I've never seen you in my life." "Yes you have. About 4 months ago you gave me a Bible." The preacher couldn't believe his eyes and ears. "You

must tell me what happened!" "Well, I smoked Matthew, and then I smoked Mark. Yet after I consumed Luke--John consumed me."

The Word of God must become *part* of us if we are to have more than a superficial Christianity. In the second Biblical example, the seed was sown on rocky places, and trouble or persecution made it ineffective. Maybe you can relate to this scenario: you love to cling to the promises of God, but the commands are a bit harder to take. Or, as long as God doesn't tell you to do anything too "radical" or something that will make you "different", you allow it to be a part of your life. There was a time when anyone who read the Bible in England did so at great risk. But a man by the name of Wycliffe saw in the Bible the remedy for the ills of his country. There was no English Bible in existence, so in the face of bitter opposition, he translated it! People appreciated the Bible. Men would even give a load of hay for the privilege of reading it *an hour*. But the people paid with their lives for reading the Word of God. Some were burned to death with copies of the Bible around their necks. In some places children were forced to light death fires under their parents, and those possessing a copy were hunted down like wild beasts.

The other seed, sown among thorns, *hears* the Word...yet allows busy schedules, money or other distractions to wreak havoc on their commitment. Ah....how many times have we committed to faithful study...until the pressures of life choke our best intentions?

Did you know that it takes 30 days to develop a habit? Just thirty days of consistency...committing yourself to a daily study of God's Word...can become a habit every bit as much as brushing your teeth or putting on your seat belt. But it must be a priority. Once a habit is developed, it is incredibly powerful! Habits are "*unconscious patterns*", and they constantly express our character and produce either effectiveness...or ineffectiveness. Yet we need to guard against the *habit of neglect* every bit as much as developing the positive *habit of consistency*.

In the final scenario, we find the seed of the Word coupled with good soil. An abundant harvest is produced: 30, 60, or even 100 times what was sown! Pastor Chuck Colson tells of the change that came over hundreds of men in prison. He went to one particular prison to establish a Bible study group. Two months later, he went back to visit and found a bunch of excited men. They swarmed around him with their Bibles as he preached and then listened to their testimonies. At one point, the men jumped to their feet and chanted "This is my Bible! It's a lamp to my feet!"

He asked "How could this have happened?" At least half of these men had been unbelievers, yet the whole prison had been transformed. The staff explained that these Christians told newcomers about their faith, invited them to Bible studies, and an abundant "harvest" was taking place!

So how do we go about this incredibly profitable business of Bible study? I love how Martin Luther put it: "I study my Bible like I gather apples. First, I shake the whole tree that the ripest may fall. Then I shake each limb, and when I have shaken each limb, I shake each branch and every twig. Then I look under every leaf."

John Wycliffe's advises:

Obtain a reliable text
Understand the logic of Scripture
Compare the parts of Scripture with one another
Maintain an attitude of humble seeking, and
Receive instruction from the Holy Spirit

As you approach a passage of Scripture, search as diligently as if you were searching for treasure, which you are! Be as thorough as a reporter. Consider the questions:

“Who”, “What”, “When” and “Where”? To whom is the writer speaking? What is he saying? What is the general theme? What is the context of his message? When did this take place? Where was it being spoken? And of course...the all important question of “How”: **How** can I relate this to **my life**? How might God want **me** to change? It's only when we allow God to transform our *behavior* that a harvest of righteousness and peace is produced!

Albert Einstein attended a dinner party. His young, college student neighbor was seated beside him. The neighbor didn't know who Einstein was, and in the course of their conversation this young girl asked the white-haired scientist, "What *are you* actually by profession?" "I devote myself to the study of physics," Einstein replied. The girl looked at him in astonishment and exclaimed, "You mean to say you study physics at **your age**? "I finished **mine** a year ago!"

What this naive girl didn't realize is that the art of “study” isn't something we do for a season and consider ourselves done with! Just as Einstein devoted his whole life to physics, we will never “master” God's Word and the Christian life on this earth. It's a **life-long pursuit**...with everlasting rewards!



Ministry

3. Read John 5:37-39. How is study of the Scriptures not synonymous with knowing God? What does true discipleship require?
4. Read II Timothy 2:15. How would you rate yourself right now as a diligent workman and student of the Bible?

What steps will you take this week to improve this “grade”?

5. Read Hebrews 5:11-14. How is it conceivable that a person who has been a Christian for years can still be “immature” in the faith?

What are some practical steps to insure growth?

6. Commit to consistency this week, and to buying an inexpensive notebook for study.



Evangelism

7. How is a love for the unsaved a sign of spiritual maturity?

8. How have you seen the Bible transform lives you thought were beyond help?



Worship

9. Take some time to pray for each other and your schedules...as you worship God for the transforming power of His Word!