

Resources by P-J Smyth

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A man of one book

John Stott rightly says that “*Christianity is, in its very essence, a religion of the word of God*”. Jesus is even called the Living Word. The bible is the most precious gift of God to us, for it is primarily through the bible that we know him. My prayer is that God will use this module to give you an insatiable appetite for the bible so that with John Wesley you would cry out:

God himself has condescended to teach the way: for this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price give me the Book of God! I have it. Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be homo unius libri [a man of one book].
(John Wesley; Preface to sermons on several occasions, 1746;
The Works of John Wesley)¹

And Charles Spurgeon calls us to be bible gluttons:

*It is blessed to eat into the very soul of the bible until, at last, you come to talk in the Scriptural language, and your spirit is flavored with the words of the Lord, so that your blood is Bibline and the very essence of the Bible flows from you (Charles Spurgeon).*²

Reading and hearing the bible is seeing God

Piper: The fundamental reason that the Word of God is essential to joy in God is that God reveals himself mainly by his Word. And seeing this revelation of God is the foundation of our joy. As it was in the days of Samuel, so it is today: “The LORD appeared . . . at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD” (1 Sam. 3:21). When it says, “The LORD appeared,” it says something amazing. God was seen not with the eyes of the head, but with the eyes of the heart, for God is “the King of ages, immortal, *invisible*, the only God” (1 Tim. 1:17). And though it may seem strange, this seeing at Shiloh happened “by the word of the LORD.” As the Word was heard, the Lord was seen. In the hearing was the seeing. The spiritual hearing of God’s Word becomes the spiritual seeing of God’s glory. Oh, how precious is the Bible!

¹ Piper. Chap 8, Pg 114, What when I don’t desire God; Crossway.

² Piper. Chap 8, Pg 115, What when I don’t desire God; Crossway.

Here is where we see God most clearly and most surely. The Holy Spirit opens our eyes and grants us to see the beauty of Christ (Matt. 16:17; Acts 16:14).³

God can and does show himself in other ways, especially through the works of believers (Matt. 5:16; 1 Pet. 2:12; 1 Cor. 12:7), creation (Rms 1v21), and signs and wonders (Acts 2v22). But, Piper goes on to say that *“none of them reveals God with the clarity and fullness of the Bible. All of them orbit around the sun of God’s written Word. And if the central gravitational power of the sun is denied, all the planets fly into confusion.... these manifestations of Christ would be vague and blurry without the written Word to guide our understanding and guard our hearts. We need the Word of God not only to see God in the Word, but to see him rightly anywhere else”*.⁴

Reluctant to read the bible?

Piper: A thousand interesting things compete for our attention to the Word of God. I confess that after fifty years of loving and reading and memorizing Scripture, I can be lured away from appointed times in the Word by something as insignificant as a new computer device. The illusory pleasure of newness can temporarily trump the far superior benefits of keeping my appointment with the Word of God.... I am not proud of it. It grieves me. At times it frightens me.... I know this sinful inclination must be fought to the death. It is this fight Paul has in mind when he says, “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you” (Col. 3:5). One of the ways we can fight against the inclinations that lure us from the Word of God to computers or television or any other substitute pleasure is to remind ourselves often of the immeasurable and superior benefits of the Word of God in our lives. We must put the evidence before us that reading, pondering, memorizing, and studying the Bible will yield more joy in this life and the next than all the things that lure us from it.⁵

The next chapter presents some of this evidence...

³ Piper. Chap 7, Pg 95-96, What when I don’t desire God; Crossway.

⁴ Piper. Chap 7, Pg 95-96, What when I don’t desire God; Crossway.

⁵ Piper. Chap 7, Pg 96-97, What when I don’t desire God; Crossway.

CHAPTER 2

EIGHT THINGS THAT THE BIBLE DOES FOR YOU

The Word is living and active (Heb 4v12) which means that it has a supernatural life of it's own to change you – all you need to do is to get it into your heart and head and it will begin to operate. Here are 8 of my favorite things that the Word can do for you:

1. Obeying the Word will bring you success

When a journalist asked David Yongi Cho for the secret of his success Cho replied, "I pray and I obey". Obedience to the Word must also accompany reading of the Word. If a thing is in the Bible, it is not even to be prayed about; it is to be acted upon.

- As Josh 1 makes abundantly clear: Word + Obedience = Success.
- In Mt 7v24-27 the rock is not the Wordit is OBEDIENCE to the Word.
- In James 1 we are taught that looking in the Word without acting on it will cause you to lack identity and stability in God.

And sometimes the Word of God sounds rather crazy at first, but that does not mean that we should not obey. Peter wrestled with this in Lk 5v1-9 but concluded that because it was *God* speaking then he would obey. Good call Peter.

2. The Word will bring you faith

Rms 10v17 makes this one crystal clear. Do you want that kind of faith that pleases God, causes the impossible to become the possible, moves mountains, destroys satanic strongholds and violently advances the kingdom of God? It comes from *hearing and hearing and hearing and hearing* the things that God has to say!

You can have faith in your feelings, in which case your feelings will govern your life. You can have faith in your fears, and so be paralyzed into inactivity. You can have faith in others, and often be disappointed. Or you can have faith in God's Word, and learn that He is utterly trustworthy in every situation. Smith-Wigglesworth said, "*Except the word of God, everything else is sand. It'll stand forever, it's settled in heaven, not one jot or tittle will fail, it can't be broken or improved upon, and those who believe in it shall be like Mt Zion that cannot be moved*".

3. The Word will bring you victory over the devil

Eph 6v17 and Heb 4 speak about the offensive, sword-like nature of the word. In his hour of temptation, Jesus used what was “written” to overcome Satan. Get into the word and become armed and dangerous!

4. The Word will make you effective and mature

2 Tim 3v14-17 are a ‘must’ for memory verses! Just look at all those things that the word will do for you! See also 2 Pet 1v3-9.

5. The Word will help you conquer sin and wrong attitudes

Reading the Word washes us (Eph 5v26) and sharpens our conscience and thinking (Heb 4v12) and keeps us from sin (Ps 119v9-11).

6. The Word will make you wise

Wisdom is different from mere knowledge of the facts. Wisdom means actually making decisions to live life in the way that God intends us to. King David was convinced of the wisdom-giving power of the Word:

*Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.
Your commands make me wiser than my enemies,
for they are ever with me.*

*I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes.
I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts
(Ps 119v97f)*

7. The Word is the key to prayer

The bible is a source of massive enrichment for prayer. My favourite way to pray is to pray out of scripture, i.e. allow scriptures to spark-off prayers. This was the way George Mueller loved to pray:

*My practice had been, at least for ten years previously, as a habitual thing, to give myself to prayer, after having dressed myself in the morning. Now . . . the first thing I did, after having asked in a few words the Lord’s blessing upon His precious word, was, to begin to meditate on the word of God, searching, as it were, into every verse, to get blessing out of it. . . . The result I have found to be almost invariably this, that after a very few minutes my soul has been led to confession, or to thanksgiving, or to intercession, or to supplication; so that, **though I did not, as it were, give myself to prayer, but to meditation, yet it turned almost immediately more or less into prayer.** When thus I have been for awhile making confession, or intercession, or supplication, or have given thanks, I go on to the next words or verse, turning all, as I go on, into prayer for myself or others, as the Word may lead to it.*

Jesus said “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you” (Jn 15v7). This means that when we

ask in line with God's word then of course we shall be answered – after all those are the things that God wants! Job said, “*I would state my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments*” (Job 23v3-4), and nothing is a more powerful argument than “*I have you on record as saying...*”!

And of course, using bible prayers as the basis for our prayers is a wonderful thing. See Eph 3v14-21, Phil 1v3-6 and 11-9, Col 1v9-14.

8. The Word will give you a highly positive self-image

Here's an extract from a sermon I preached some years ago: If the source of our self-image lies anywhere other than God's Word, we will either have an inflated opinion of ourselves, or an inferiority complex. James speaks of the Word as a mirror and if you look into it you will love what you see! It is where we should look to find out all about ourselves. Anyone who tells you something about yourself that doesn't match up with what the Word says about you is lying. But the problem is that a lie is more powerful than the truth, if we believe it. Most of us have a wrong image of ourselves because we have fallen for the lies spoken over us such as “you will never amount to much in your life”. Oh really? Jeremiah 29 would seriously differ with this.

You need to renew your image of yourself by meditating on what God's Word says about you. You are unique in the universe, you have no duplicate, and God has set *no limits on your life*. Who would have dreamed that an insignificant German corporal in World War One called Adolph Hitler would start World War 2? Or that a bashful school-boy called Winston Churchill, who spoke with a lisp, who was useless at arithmetic and Latin, would end up as the most famous British Prime Minister? Or that a skinny little half-blind Indian called Mahatma Ghandi would defeat the might of the British Empire? And these men shame us by achieving without having the benefit that we boast of having a miracle-working God as our partner!

Who would have dreamed that a young shepherd-boy called David would reign as king and write some of the bible? Or that a stuttering, 5 foot guy called Saul would write the most of the New Testament?

And if the majority says it can't be done, it still doesn't mean it is true! The majority said that the earth was flat! Scientists said that what goes up comes down, but now we have satellites that will never come down! The sporting authorities said that no human will ever run a mile in 4 mins. Then Roger Bannister did and 1000's have since. Recently, 27 people did in one race! We need to reject the bias & limits of others! Don't let them create your world - **let God's word be the benchmark of reality for you!**

Don't let others be your mirror - let God's Word be your mirror! Am I being unrealistic? No, I'm being biblical! Do I have my head up in the clouds? No, I have my head down in this book! *O give me that book! At any price give me the Book of God! I have it. Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be homo unius libri - a man of one book (John Wesley).*

CHAPTER 3

REGULAR BIBLE READING

What type of bible should I use?

There are various English translations of the original texts. The difference between them is small and they are still saying the same thing, just in different ways. Some translations attempt to translate as close to the original language as possible (e.g. King James; New American Standard). Others are less concerned about the exact words and attempt to translate the ideas from one language into another (e.g. Living Bible; The Message). Others attempt to translate the text as precisely as possible but are more contemporary in matters of language, style and grammar (e.g. New International Version).⁶

I was recently in a Christian Bookshop and I made a note of all the different type of bibles on sale:

Fruit of Spirit Bible; Leadership Bible; Life Promises Bible; Daily Bible; One Year Chronological Bible; Ultra-thin Bible; Gift Award Bible; Encouragement Bible; Narrative Bible; Family Bible; Dad's Bible; Student Bible; Mum's bible; Parallel Bible; End Times Bible; Spirit-filled Bible; Men of Integrity Bible; Woman of Faith Study Bible; Mum's Devotional Bible; Woman's Bible; Bible for Small Group study Bible; Key-word Bible; Life Application Bible; Living Water Bible for those who thirst; New Believers Bible; Praise & Worship Study Bible; Living Faith Bible; Student Life Application Bible.

Whatever bible you go for, *the trick is to actually read it!*

The Importance of Planning

Piper: Another name for serious intention is planning. Most Christians neglect their bibles not out of conscious disloyalty to Jesus, but because of failure to plan a time and place and method to read it. The result is not spontaneity, but the same old rut. If your longing is to be spontaneous in the way you commune with God, then build discipline into your Bible reading and prayer. It sounds paradoxical. But it's no more so than the paradox of corn spontaneously growing in a Minnesota field because of the farmer's discipline of plowing and sowing and guarding the field. He doesn't make the corn grow. God does. But God uses his farming disciplines as part of the process. The rich fruit of spontaneity grows in the garden that is well tended by the discipline of schedule. So I say again, plan a place and a time when you will read the Bible and think about it each day. There can always be more times during the day. There should

⁶ Pg 10, Enjoying God's Word, Heldeberg Christian Fellowship.

be. But let there be one sacred time and place. Put it on your calendar. Treat it the same way you would an appointment with a partner or friend. If someone asks you to do something during that time, say, “I’m sorry, I already have an appointment then.”⁷

When?

Smyth: The answer is whatever time works best for you. Fortunately God is awake and available all the time, so He will fit in with you! The preference of most Christians is to try and follow the example of King David⁸ and Jesus⁹ to meet with God right at the start of the day. It certainly makes good sense to sharpen your sword before going into battle, and it can be risky leaving it until later in the day because it can get squeezed out so easily. Whatever time of day you choose, try and use the same time and place each day so that it becomes a part of your routine. In the busy lives that we lead, we need to be ruthless in setting quality time aside for our important relationships, and no relationship is more important than with Jesus.¹⁰

Piper: I earnestly recommend that it be in the early morning, unless there are some extenuating circumstances. Entering the day without a serious meeting with God, over his Word and in prayer, is like entering the battle without tending to your weapons. It’s like taking a trip without filling the tires with air or the tank with gas. The human heart does not replenish itself with sleep. The body does, but not the heart. The spiritual air leaks from our tires, and the gas is consumed in the day. We replenish our hearts not with sleep, but with the Word of God and prayer. Thousands of saints have discovered through the centuries that starting the day by filling the mind with the Word of God will bring more joy and more love and more power than traveling on yesterday’s gas.¹¹

Where?

Smyth: Mark 1v35 records that Jesus chose a “solitary place” to spend time alone with His heavenly Father. Try and find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed.¹²

Piper: Pick a place of seclusion. If you try to read your Bible and pray where people are moving about, the powers of darkness will exploit that potential for distraction with all their might. Don’t think it has to be comfy. In fact, comfy will probably put you to sleep. It needs to be secluded so that you are not distracted, and so that you can speak out loud and sing and cry. You will cry sooner or later—when you are wrestling for the soul of

⁷ Piper. Chap 8, Pg 115, What when I don’t desire God; Crossway.

⁸ Ps 5v3

⁹ Mk 1v35

¹⁰ PJ Smyth. From Get Started – A 6 part discipleship course for new believers.

¹¹ Piper. Chap 8, Pg 116, What when I don’t desire God; Crossway.

¹² PJ Smyth. From Get Started – A 6 part discipleship course for new believers.

your teenager, or struggling to keep your marriage together, or laboring to kill the pride in your life. You need to be alone. If your family situation or home does not have such a place, then create it, not by space, but by rule. That is, arrange that the children or the spouse or the roommates will not speak to you during the appointed time. One saintly mother with a large brood of children would use her apron to make a tent for her head and her Bible at the kitchen table, and the children were taught, when mother is in her tent, make no noise.¹³

How long?

Smyth: The largest living animal is the Rorqual, or Blue Whale. It is 30m long and weighs over 120 tonnes. It is longer than 10 elephants and as heavy as 20. But did you know that it feeds regularly on tiny shrimps? To grow big and strong, your daily appointment doesn't need to be long, but it does need to be regular. It is usually better to have smaller, daily meals rather than a binge once a week. You will probably start off by spending just a few minutes each day reading and praying, and then as the days go by you may well find that you need more and more time with Jesus.¹⁴

How?

Piper: There are many ways to read the Bible. Any is better than none. Coming to the appointed place and time with no plan for how to read the Bible usually results in a hit-and-miss approach that leaves you feeling weak, unreal, and discouraged.¹⁵

Method 1: Systematic reading through the bible

George Mueller aged 71: *Now . . . I would give a few hints to my younger fellow-believers as to the way in which to keep up spiritual enjoyment. It is absolutely needful . . . we should read regularly through the Scriptures, consecutively, and not pick out here and there a chapter. If we do, we remain spiritual dwarfs. I tell you so affectionately. For the first four years after my conversion I made no progress, because I neglected the Bible. But when I regularly read on through the whole with reference to my own heart and soul, I directly made progress. Then my peace and joy continued more and more. Now I have been doing this for 47 years. I have read through the whole Bible about 100 times and I always find it fresh when I begin again. Thus my peace and joy have increased more and more.*¹⁶

Piper: For many years I have read through the Bible once each year following "The Discipleship Journal Bible Reading Plan." The month is May as I write this chapter, and I have just read this morning sections from

¹³ Piper. Chap 8, Pg 117, What when I don't desire God; Crossway.

¹⁴ PJ Smyth. From Get Started – A 6 part discipleship course for new believers.

¹⁵ Piper. Chap 8, Pg 117, What when I don't desire God; Crossway.

¹⁶ Piper. Chap 8, Pg 118, What when I don't desire God; Crossway.

Mark, Galatians, Psalms, and 2 Samuel. The design is to read daily from two Old Testament and two New Testament books. I find this variety helpful. Others don't, and would rather use some other approach. That's fine. The one great benefit of "The Discipleship Journal Bible Reading Plan" is that it gives you assignments for only twenty-five days out of the month. This means that any failures to keep up can be overcome each month in the makeup days. This is a wonderful dose of realism for the average sinful reader (including me). And if you are already up-to-date at the end of twenty-five days, then you have five or six days to do special memory work or to read some other part of the Bible that you have been missing.¹⁷ (This method can also be adjusted so that you read through the bible in 2 years).

Method 2: Bible Reading Notes

Some people like to use Bible Notes (available in most Christian Bookshops) which suggest a different passage to read each day, and also help you understand what the passage means.

To help you get going...

To help you get going, may I share with you a way that I sometimes have my daily time with Jesus?

Start with a time of thanks & praise: This always brings a sense of closeness to God. We see this principle in Psalms where David says, "*Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise*"¹⁸ and "*Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits*"¹⁹. Praise means to tell God how great he is. Thanksgiving means to deliberately remember and thank God for all he has done for you. Some days you will spill over with adoration and thanksgiving, and on other days you may like to use some verses in the bible to help focus your praise and thanks. Many of the Psalms are good for this. In fact, I have found that using bible verses to launch my prayers of thanks and praise is a mighty, mighty key to knowing God more, drawing closer to him in prayer, and praying for much longer!

Then move into a time of reading the bible: Now it is time to read the bible. You might be using Bible Notes, or you might be simply working your way through a book of the bible reading a chapter or so each day. Whichever way you are doing it, once you have read the passage, the key question to ask is "**how does this apply to me?**" And suddenly the bible becomes relevant to our own lives! How exciting! Some days you will find that God will speak to you very clearly about specific things in your life, and bible truths will seem to leap out at you. Other days you will find that God

¹⁷ Piper. Chap 8, Pg 117, What when I don't desire God; Crossway.

¹⁸ Ps 100v4

¹⁹ Ps 103v2

speaks to you in a more general way. Actually, this is just like any friendship. Sometimes you talk about very relevant and meaningful things, but a lot of the time you just chat!

Then end with a time of request prayers: You will probably want to start by thanking him for the things you have just learned from the bible, and to pray into the application for your life. Also, confess and repent any areas of sin in your life that have come to mind. But it is then important to spend some time praying for your day ahead, for your family, friends, home, and church. Pray that God would break into the lives of your friends and family who do not yet know Jesus. Pray also for your own needs. Then go and have a great day walking close to Jesus!

One last thing: Even with the best intentions in the world, you will experience periods when you miss your daily appointment with Jesus. Don't feel guilty. Don't feel guilty. Don't feel guilty. Jesus is not scolding you for missing these times with Him, but He is certainly looking forward to meeting one-on-one with you again soon! What a wonderful friend He is; his love for you is UNCONDITIONAL!²⁰

Application

Write your answers below each question:

When will you have your daily time?

Where will you have your daily time?

What bible reading method will you use?

Who will be your accountability partner and encourager?

²⁰ PJ Smyth. From Get Started – A 6 part discipleship course for new believers.

CHAPTER 4

THE IMPORTANCE OF A LEADER'S DAILY DEVOTIONS

The whole point of a devotional life is connecting with God. This is our primary antidote to the counterfeits the world holds out to us. If you do not have God, and have him deeply, you will turn to other lovers.

(John Eldredge)

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT REALLY?

Leaders need to have daily devotions for the myriad of reasons that any Christian needs to: he needs to imitate Christ (Mk 1v35); he needs to worship and enjoy Jesus; he needs to eat daily 'bread'; he needs to submit himself to the creative power of God's word and allow himself to be taught, rebuked and trained so that he may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3v16); he needs to enjoy presenting prayers and petitions, with thanksgiving to Christ (Phil 4v6); he needs to soak daily in the undisputed grace of God. What a privilege to access Jesus alone! Such is the quickening of the new-man at this prospect, no wonder the terrible triplets of the 'world, the flesh and the devil' do their worst to hinder us from such delight!

But there is a graver compulsion upon a leader to secure authentic, regular, personal time with Jesus. The reason is leadership. The nature of leadership is influence. The nature of Christian leadership is Christian influence. In the leader's life, the absence or presence of authentic, regular, personal time with Jesus now impacts not just himself, but many others. The stakes have been raised. Is this not the warning of James 3v1 "*Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly*".

TRUTH 1: THE PRIVATE PURPOSE

The purpose of your daily devotional time is **not** to prepare sermons or bible studies. It is concerned exclusively with your personal worship, enjoyment and growth in God. It keeps you anchored daily into Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour, rather than your employer. It keeps you pure and unstained by spiritual professionalism. The moment you begin to regard your time with Jesus as a passport to better public ministry, you are sliding into deep trouble. Ministry has become your idol. Ministry has become your intermediary through which you relate to Jesus.

TRUTH 2: THE PUBLIC BLESSING

However, it is *because* of the pure, intimate and authentic nature of a daily devotion, that your devotional life will *of course* be the primary source of

your ministry effectiveness! It was *because of* Jesus' frequent withdrawals that he chose the right leaders, and that the words he spoke were so mighty.

"Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not my own" (Jn 14v10)

"For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me" (Jn 17v8)

"I do not hide your righteousness in my heart ... I do not conceal your love and truth from the great assembly" (Ps 40v10)

"What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs" (Mt 10v27)

This is a pattern that I often use:

10 MINS: WORSHIP & PRAYER

- **Worship & thanksgiving**
 - *Often using the opening verses of a Psalm (E.g. Ps 103)*
 - *Aspects of God; Creation; People;*
 - *Weaving spirit & understanding*
- **Prayer circles**
 - *Self (for more sanctification, character and gifting)*
 - *Family (for more sanctification, character and gifting)*
 - *Church (Elders, Staff, Leaders, Min Areas, Events)*
 - *Newfrontiers (Churches in Southern African and world-wide)*
 - *Nations*

10 MINS: WORD

- **Meditating**
 - *Read & engage through immediate prayer & application*
- **Marking**
 - *Underline any great verses*
 - *Bracket the themes of verses to use e.g. T = Tongue; Gr = Grace; Ap = Apostolic)*

10 MINS: WRITE

This final 20mins provides the opportunity to compile verses, cell & sermon outlines, and ideas. It is time well spent because it:

- *Is economical* use of time (doubling up on devotional & study time without merging them)
- Means *authentic* preaching, because these are things God has shown you direct

Is hopefully *anointed* after 20 mins with Jesus!

CHAPTER 5

MEMORIZING SCRIPTURE

More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb” (Ps 19v10).

*“I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you”
(Ps 119v11)*

Now that we have looked at the importance of reading the bible with planned regularity, let’s talk now about memorizing verses, paragraphs, chapters and even whole books. Dallas Willard says, *“Bible memorization is absolutely fundamental to spiritual formation. If I had to choose between all the disciplines of the spiritual life, I would choose Bible memorization, because it is a fundamental way of filling our mind with what it needs. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth. That’s where you need it! How does it get in your mouth? Memorization.”*²¹

Piper: The joy-producing effects of memorizing Scripture and having it in my head and heart are incalculable. The world and its God-ignoring, all embracing secularism is pervasive. It invades my mind every day. What hope is there to have a mind filled with Christ except to have a mind filled with his Word? I know of no alternative...Let me be very practical and challenge you to do something you perhaps have never done. If you are not a memorizer at all, shift up to memorizing a Bible verse a week.¹⁶ If you only memorize single verses, shift up to memorizing some paragraphs or chapters (like Psalm 1 or Psalm 23 or Romans 8). And if you have ventured to memorize chapters, shift up to memorize a whole book or part of a book. Few things have a greater effect on the way we see God and the world than to memorize extended portions of Scripture.²²

Is it worth the effort?

I spend this much time on Bible memory because I believe in the power of the indwelling Word of God to solve a thousand problems before they happen, and to heal a thousand wounds after they happen, and to kill a thousand sins in the moment of temptation, and to sweeten a thousand days with the “drippings of the honeycomb.” I am jealous for you, my readers, that you would “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col 3v16). This is the path to solid joy and all the service of love that it sustains. Christ will be seen as the fortune he is when we treasure his Word more than money, and when the joy it awakens overflows with sacrificial love (2 Cor 8v2).²³

²¹ Piper. Chap 8, Pg 119, What when I don’t desire God; Crossway.

²² Piper. Chap 8, Pg 119 & 121, What when I don’t desire God; Crossway.

²³ Piper. Chap 8, Pg 123, What when I don’t desire God; Crossway.

How do you memorize a whole book?

Piper: I will borrow Andrew Davis's method and simply give it to you as he gives it in his booklet. It's the method I use. The following is an example of how someone could go about memorizing Ephesians at the rate of one verse per day:

Day one: Read Ephesians 1:1 out loud ten times, looking at each word as if photographing it with your eyes. Be sure to include the verse number. Then cover the page and recite it ten times. You're done for the day.

Day two: Yesterday's verse first!! Recite yesterday's verse, Ephesians 1:1 ten times, being sure to include the verse number. Look in the Bible if you need to, just to refresh your memory. Now, do your new verse. Read Ephesians 1:2 out loud ten times, looking at each word as if photographing it with your eyes. Be sure to include the verse number. Then cover the page and recite it ten times. You're done for the day.

3) Day three: Yesterday's verse first!! Recite yesterday's verse, Ephesians 1:2 ten times, being sure to include the verse number. Again, you should look in the Bible if you need to, just to refresh your memory. Old verses next, altogether: Recite Ephesians 1:1-2 together once, being sure to include the verse numbers. Now, do your new verse. Read Ephesians 1:3 out loud ten times, looking at each word as if photographing it with your eyes. Be sure to include the verse number. Then cover the page and recite it ten times. You're done for the day.

4) Day four: Yesterday's verse first!! Recite yesterday's verse, Ephesians 1:3 ten times, being sure to include the verse number. Again, you should look in the Bible if you need to, just to refresh your memory. Old verses next, altogether: Recite Ephesians 1:1-3 together once, being sure to include the verse numbers. Now, do your new verse. Read Ephesians 1:4 out loud ten times, looking at each word as if photographing it with your eyes. Be sure to include the verse number. Then cover the page and recite it ten times. You're done for the day.

This cycle would continue through the entire book. Obviously, the "old verses altogether" stage will soon swell to take the most time of all. That's exactly the way it should be. The entire book of Ephesians can be read at a reasonable rate in less than fifteen minutes. Therefore, the "old verses altogether" stage of your review should not take longer than that on any given day. Do it with the Bible ready at hand, in case you draw a blank or get stuck . . . there's no shame in looking, and it actually helps to nail down troublesome verses so they will never be trouble again.²⁴

²⁴ Piper. Chap 8, Pg 122, What when I don't desire God; Crossway.

CHAPTER 6

MEDITATING ON SCRIPTURE

*“Oh how I love your law! It is my **meditation** all the day. . . . I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my **meditation**” (Ps. 119v97, 99)*

*“His delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he **meditates** day and night” (Ps 1v2). “My eyes are awake before the watches of the night, that I may **meditate** on your promise” (Ps 119v148)*

*“On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will **meditate**” (Ps 145v5)*

*“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall **meditate** on it day and night” (Josh 1v8)*

I would rather my soul lay a-soak in a single verse of scripture than rinse my hands in a couple of chapters everyday (Spurgeon)²⁵

Piper: I have often counseled people who tell me that they don't see anything when they read the Bible, “Go home and this time, write the text, instead of just reading it. If anything stands out as helpful, make a mark and write down your ideas about it”. Writing is a way of slowing us down and opening our eyes to see what we do not otherwise see. This struck me so forcefully one day that I paused and wrote:

*I know not how the light is shed, nor understand this lens.
I only know that there are eyes in pencils and in pens.*

The word *meditation* in Hebrew means basically to speak or to mutter. When this is done in the heart, it is called musing or meditation. So meditating on the Word of God day and night means to *speak to yourself the Word of God day and night and to speak to yourself about it—to mull it over, to ask questions about it and answer them from the Scripture itself, to ask yourself how this might apply to you and others, and to ponder its implications for life and church and culture and missions.*

One simple way to do this is to memorize a verse or two and then say them to yourself once, emphasizing the first word. Then say them to yourself again, emphasizing the second word. Then say them a third time, emphasizing the third word. And so on, over and over again, until you have meditated on the reason why each word is there. Then you can start asking relational questions. If *this* word is used, why is *that* word used? The possibilities of musing and pondering and meditating are endless. And always we pray as we ponder, asking for God's help and light.²⁶

²⁵ Bible Interpretation, Newfrontiers Church Planting and Leadership School, Pg 50.

²⁶ Piper. Chap 8, Pg 123-4, What when I don't desire God; Crossway.

CHAPTER 7

READING BOOKS, ESPECIALLY ABOUT THE BIBLE, AND THINKING

Reading books will change you

Charles Jones said that “you are the same today as you will be five years from now except for two things: the people with whom you associate and the books you read”.

Conversing with amazing people

Rene Descartes said the “the reading of *all good books is like conversation with the finest men of past centuries*”. When I was in my final year at school I had the privilege of sharing a meal with a man who was tutored by C.S. Lewis at Oxford University. He shared how Lewis was a brilliant teacher and how he had the capacity to memorize entire books, probably with a photographic memory. I was so impressed with what this man said about C.S. Lewis that I started to read books by C.S. Lewis such as *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. And now, strangely enough, I feel like I know C.S. Lewis quite well myself!

Should I read all books in the same depth?

I don't think so. I have some books that are my favourites that I return to read again every couple of years, and others that I speed read to catch the overall message, and others that I focus on particular sections. Francis Bacon summed it up well saying, “Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested; that is, some books are to be read only in parts, others to be read but not curiously, and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention.”

Should I only read easy, modern books?

John Piper writes, “*If a book is easy and fits nicely into all your language conventions and thought forms, then you probably will not grow much from reading it. It may be entertaining, but not enlarging to your understanding. It's the hard books that count. Raking is easy, but all you get is leaves. Digging is hard, but you might find diamonds.*”²⁷

He goes on to quote Mortimer Adler: “*Books must make demands on you. They must seem to you to be beyond your capacity*”

He then quotes C.S. Lewis: “*There is a strange idea abroad that in every subject the ancient books should only be read by the professional, and that*

²⁷ Pg 27-29 in *God's Passion for his glory*, Inter-varsity Press, 1998, John Piper.

the amateur should connect himself with the modern books... This mistaken preference for the modern books and this shyness of the old ones is nowhere more rampant than in theology.... Now this seems to me topsy-turvy. Naturally, since I myself am a writer, I do not wish the ordinary reader to read no modern books. But if he must read only the new or the old, I would advise him to read the old.... It is a good rule, after reading a new book, never to allow yourself another new one until you have read an old one in between. If that is too much for you, you should at least one old one to every three new ones... we all need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period.... The only palliative is to keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds, and can be done only by reading old books.”²⁸

Reading books specifically about the bible

John Piper says: *I have the profound sense that many people who complain of not being able to rejoice in God treat the knowledge of God as something that ought to be easy to get. They are passive. They expect spiritual things to happen to them from out of nowhere. They don't grasp the pattern of the Bible expressed in Proverbs 2v1-6:*

If you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

Look at all those aggressive words: “receive . . . treasure up . . . make your ear attentive . . . incline your heart . . . call out . . . raise your voice . . . seek . . . search” - if you do these, then knowledge of God will be yours. Not because you can make it happen. The giving of the knowledge is still in the hands of God: “For the LORD gives wisdom.” No, the pursuit of the knowledge of God is not because you can make it happen, but because God freely chooses to bless seeking with finding. The pattern is seen in 2 Timothy 2:7 where Paul says, “Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.” You think. The Lord gives. Our thinking does not replace his giving. And his giving does not replace our thinking.”²⁹

Piper goes on to quote C.S. Lewis: “For my own part, I tend to find the doctrinal books often more helpful in devotion than the devotional books,

²⁸ Pg 27-29 in *God's Passion for his glory*, Inter-varsity Press, 1998, John Piper. *The Reading of Old Books in God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1970, Pg 200-207)

²⁹ Piper. Chap 8, Pg 126, *What when I don't desire God*; Crossway.

and I rather suspect that the same experience may await many others. I believe that many who find that 'nothing happens' when they sit down, or kneel down, to a book of devotion, would find that the heart sings unbidden while they are working their way through a tough bit of theology with a pipe in their teeth and a pencil in their hand".³⁰

³⁰ Piper. Chap 8, Pg 127, What when I don't desire God; Crossway.

CHAPTER 8

PREACHING AND BIBLE STUDY WITH OTHER BELIEVERS

The Word of God is meant to be a community treasure and a community event. It should be alive in the fellowship of believers.³¹

The preaching and teaching of the bible is an essential activity in a biblical church – the demonstration of, and references to, preaching in the ministry of Jesus in the gospels, in the acts of the early church, and throughout the epistles are on nearly every page. God has anointed teachers to bring alive the word of God to people in a way that no amount of individual study and reading could. Make sure that you are part of a church where you have regular opportunities for group discussion and bible study, and the corporate preaching of the Word.

How important are church meetings?

Although the church is a family not a meeting, meetings are very important. As the following verses show, a church should prioritize both **big** meetings and **small** meetings that function to **spur us on** in our lives for Jesus:

*Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts
(Acts 2:46)*

*Let us consider how we may **spur one another on** towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us **encourage one another** – and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Heb 10v24-25)*

What is the purpose of ‘big’ Sunday meetings?

Sunday meetings are the focal point for our life together. We approach Sundays with purpose, expectant of God’s presence and power with us as we gather to him. The reasons for Sunday meetings include:

Vibrant worship: Worshipping alone and in small groups is wonderful, but there is a different experience of power and dynamism in worship when the whole congregation gathers together.

Powerful preaching: We believe in the power and effectiveness of preaching from the word. Christ himself – the one who is himself *the living and enduring word* (1 Peter 1:23) – walks through the congregation when the word is preached.

³¹ Piper. Chap 8, Pg 130, What when I don’t desire God; Crossway.

Vision-casting: Sundays provide the opportunity for church vision to be cast and pace to be set. Our Sunday meetings are vital for us in maintaining momentum and a sense of purpose and direction together.

Value-modelling: Many of our values can be powerfully modelled in Sunday meetings such as our life in the Spirit, team leadership, cross-cultural expression, down-to-earthness and so on.

Visibility & Profile: Because we are a people on a mission, we don't want to be hidden away in a corner. Jesus wants to show off his Bride like a city set on a hill (Mt 5v14-16), and Sundays are when we are at our most visible. When we come together in love as a church family from different backgrounds, race and social status, it is a witness to the world. No one believer can be the Body of Christ on his own. We need others in order to fully express what God has given us. It is when we are together, not when we're separated, that we are his Body. Our meetings are not just meetings! They are a prophetic statement of our being part of the Body of Christ.

Serving: We encourage serving because it is an essential characteristic of the Christian life. Jesus himself, *Did not come to be served but to serve* (Matthew 20:28). There are countless different ways in which we can serve God at church, many of which happen at other times and places than the Sunday meeting. But because the Sunday meeting is so important to us we encourage all church members to serve in a practical way at least once a month on a Sunday.

Training: Like every other activity in church life, Sunday meetings are a forum to help develop other leaders, especially worship leaders, musicians, sound people, preachers and meeting leaders. Therefore, we will not always put our 'A' Team players on the field, and the church must catch the vision for this and support the up-and-coming leaders. In this manner, the church becomes an exciting place to be, with pew-warmers beginning to feel "*if they can do it maybe I can too!*" We are on a mission not on a meeting! Meetings serve the mission which is to disciple and raise up more leaders!

What is the purpose of 'small meetings' - Life Groups?

The purpose of Life Groups is not primarily to meet together once per week (although we do), but rather to '*do life*' together. Life Groups are intimate communities of friends within the wider community of our church. All those who feel a sense of belonging are members of these small, intimate groups of friends. *We have found that it is not possible to care for someone who isn't attached to a Life Group – it simply doesn't work.*

The purposes of Life Groups are C, D, E:

Community: Sometimes people worry that if the church grows they will no longer know many people in the church. Apparently, the average church member knows a maximum of 70 people in the congregation, whether the church has two hundred or two thousand attending. A member does not have to know everyone in the church in order to feel a sense of belonging, but does have to know some people! The way for you to get to know people is to be part of a Life Group.

Discipleship: The Great Commission is to *make disciples* "...teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28v20). Discipleship involves helping a person actually make consistent and tangible progress in God in character, gifting and service. Life Groups are challenging and provoking!

Evangelism: We are deliberate in never letting a Life Group become a stagnant holy huddle. In addition to the C & D above, each Life Group is on a mission to win the lost and continually welcome in new people, and before long multiply into two groups.

CHAPTER 9

SIX WAYS TO GET THE MOST OUT OF A SERMON

In the parable of the sower that Jesus told, there is a great deal of emphasis on the state of the soil i.e. the heart of the listener. Here are 6 ways that I believe that we need to participate as we listen to a sermon in order to get the most out of it:

1. **Receive with word with faith:** Heb 4v1-2 talks about two different groups of people that listened to the same message. One group profited from the message, whilst the other did not. The difference? The difference was that one group combined what they were hearing with faith, whilst the other group didn't. We are to receive the word with a 'yes' in our spirits, not a reluctant scepticism. Be child-like in your hunger for truth. Believe it. Drink it in. I am a big fan of the scripture "*I believed therefore I spoke*" so when I am listening to a sermon I grunt, nod, say 'amen', write things down – I get stuck in! I am trying my best to welcome in this seed to my soil by receiving it with faith.
2. **Receive the word eagerly, but don't throw your brain away:** In Acts 17v11 the Bereans were commended for receiving the word eagerly but also checking the scriptures for themselves to check that what was being preached was true.
3. **Encourage the preacher:** In his wisdom, God has ordained it that preaching is the word of God coming to us via personalities – people. So if the preacher is feeling comfortable and encouraged he will probably do a better job in sowing the seed.
4. **Listen with your inner ears:** Jesus was fond of pointing out that we have inner as well as outer ears. Listening with our inner ears means to listen with an attentive and discerning spirit. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you hear and understand the word.
5. **Listen for yourself and others:** Paul told Timothy to pass on to others the things that he had heard Paul preaching (2 Tim 2v2). You are not just listening for yourself, but so that you can pass on truth to others.
6. **Be a hearer and doer of the word:** According to Lk 6v46f and Jms 1v22, listening without doing is a dangerous thing to do, causing us to end up insecure, cynical and eventually in a state of collapse. Take a tip from Nike and *just do it*.

APPENDIX A

OUR APPROACH TO THE BIBLE

By David Adams

Because God is infinite and holy and far beyond us (God is *transcendent*) while we are finite and fallen, we cannot know God unless He reveals Himself to us. God has revealed Himself to us in various ways. Generally, He has shown Himself:

- in creation (Acts 14:17; Romans 1:19-20)
- in human nature – our moral sense or conscience (Romans 2:14-15).

Specially, God has taken the initiative to reveal Himself through His saving acts and words in history, with the Incarnation of Christ as the height of this revelation (Acts 2:22, 32, 36). Furthermore, God has given us the Bible - a written record or testimony as to how God has spoken and acted in history. The Bible points us to God, and encourages us to enter into a living, dynamic relationship with Him. The Bible focuses not on the *letter* but on the *spirit* – on God Himself.

In the Word, we encounter the living God: “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*” (John 1:1). It is all about relationship. Indeed, Jesus proclaims in John 14:6, “*I am the way and the truth and the life.*” How, then, do we approach the Bible?

1. The Bible is unique

The Bible was compiled over approximately 1600 years, and the 39 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament were written by some 40 authors. Yet there is an amazing harmony, so that the Bible speaks with one voice concerning God, humankind and the way of salvation. The Bible tells us how God has acted and revealed Himself in history (for example through the Exodus, the covenant at Mount Sinai, and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus), and it provides for us an authoritative interpretation of events. Included in the Bible there is a rich variety of different types of literature and styles. In addition to the record of events and their interpretation, there are for example sections of poetry, prophecy, law, parables, and even letters.

The Bible can be studied as a human book (for example, examining different characteristics and emphases of the various writers, and how and when their books were written, just as one may study other ancient writers), and there are scholars who study the Bible in this way.

But, we also approach the Bible like no other book: listening to it, submitting to its teaching, recognising its authority as coming from God, confident that the Holy Spirit will bring it alive for us.

2. The Bible is inspired

“All Scripture is God-breathed...” (2 Tim 3v16)

Inspiration is not mechanical (for the writers contribute their own style and research), nor merely a heightening of the religious perceptions of the writers. Inspiration is a supernatural work of God, whereby He causes truth to be expressed through people in a manner that reflects the character and background of the writer while being God-breathed.

In Jesus' day the inspiration of the books of the Old Testament was clearly recognised, as can be seen from the way in which Jesus and the apostles referred to Old Testament scripture. It is on their authority that the Old Testament is part of the Christian canon of the Bible. Early in the life of the Church the inspiration of the books that form the New Testament was recognised by the churches; indeed, the later parts of the New Testament already refer to the Gospel material and to Paul's letters as authoritative Scripture. In the first few centuries of the church there was however a period of hesitation in some areas before certain books (notably Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude and Revelation) were finally recognised. The matter of which books were part of the New Testament was formally settled during the latter part of the fourth century AD. When including books in the canon, the church did not think it was giving them some new authority. Rather, it was formally recognising the inherent authority they already possessed, and which was already experienced in the faith and practice of the church.

3. The Bible is authoritative

Since the Bible is the Word of God, it is authoritative for belief and life. In fact we believe that it is the final and sufficient authority in all matters of faith and conduct. The Bible must therefore be given precedence over:

- our own opinions and beliefs
- our experience
- tradition (it must judge all church and cultural traditions).

The *sufficiency of Scripture* means that the Bible contains everything we need God to tell us for salvation, for trusting Him perfectly, and for obeying him perfectly.

4. The Bible is inerrant

Since Scripture is God-breathed, we believe that it is without error - that the Bible, as it was originally written down and when correctly interpreted, is entirely true in all it affirms, whether doctrinal, ethical, social, physical, or relational.

The Bible has been copied and passed on over the centuries with an amazing textual reliability. Textually the Bible is the most reliable of any ancient book in existence. For the New Testament over 5300 Greek manuscripts still exist, with the oldest dating back to AD 130. The amazing reliability of the Old Testament was shown when the Dead Sea scrolls (with a text dating back to 125 BC) were discovered some 50 years ago.

APPENDIX B

A SURVEY OF THE BIBLE

By David Adams

The OLD TESTAMENT books may be categorised as follows:

The Pentateuch (history & law)

Genesis	Leviticus	Deuteronomy
Exodus	Numbers	

The History books

Joshua	1 & 2 Samuel	Ezra
Judges	1 & 2 Kings	Nehemiah
Ruth	1 & 2 Chronicles	Esther

Poetry & Wisdom (drama, poetry & wisdom)

Job	Proverbs	Song of Songs
Psalms	Ecclesiastes	

The Prophets (prophecy, poetry & history)

Isaiah	Joel	Habakkuk
Jeremiah	Amos	Zephaniah
Lamentations	Obadiah	Haggai
Ezekiel	Jonah	Zechariah
Daniel	Micah	Malachi
Hosea	Nahum	

The NEW TESTAMENT books may be categorised as follows:

The Gospels & Acts (history & teaching)

Matthew	Luke	Acts
Mark	John	

The Epistles (letters & teaching)

Romans	1 & 2 Corinthians	Galatians
Ephesians	Philippians	Colossians
1 & 2 Thessalonians	1 & 2 Timothy	Titus
Philemon	Hebrews	James
1 & 2 Peter	1, 2 & 3 John	Jude

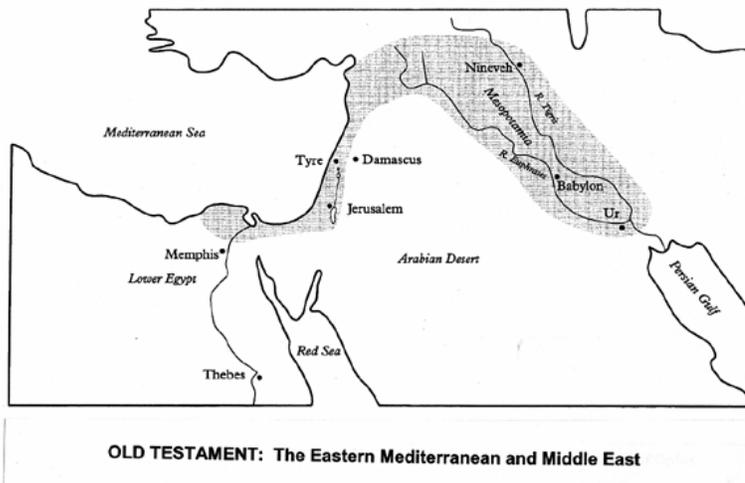
Revelation (letters & prophecy)

The Old Testament

The Pentateuch

The Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) focuses on the story of God's people from the call of Abraham to the death of Moses, and covers the period through to about the 13th century BC.

- **Genesis 1-11** is a prologue, which serves both to introduce the main themes of the narrative and to relate them to God's purposes in a world of fallen humanity, of divided nations, and of a created order which was originally good.
- **Genesis 12-50** covers the four generations of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph).
- **Exodus-Deuteronomy** are dominated by the majestic figure of Moses.



The key themes contained in the Pentateuch are:

Election

Election involves God's special choosing of individuals, together with promises and responsibilities. God's promises to Abraham were not just for the selfish enjoyment of a chosen few. Right at the heart of God's choice of Israel it is made plain that God has a missionary purpose - thus God's special favour was to be shown not only to Abraham and his family but to all people through him.

Covenant

To the Hebrew mind, covenants covered all human relationships - they were the bonds that united people in mutual obligations (whether through a marriage contract, a business enterprise, or a verbal undertaking).

Covenant is used to describe three separate occasions in the Pentateuch:

- God's promises to Noah never again to send a flood upon the earth (Gen 9:9)
- God's promises to Abraham (Gen 15:18; 17:4)
- The Sinai covenant established with Moses (Ex 24:7).

These covenants were based on the initiative of God, implied a new revelation of God, and made moral and ritual demands upon the people.

Law

The idea of law is central to the Pentateuch. At its simplest it covered the Ten Commandments (Ex 20; Deut 5), but associated with these were various collections of laws which have been classified as follows:

- the book of the covenant (Ex 21-23)
- the holiness code (Lev 17-26)
- the law of Deuteronomy (Deut 12-26).

The ceremonial and ritual laws, which occupy much of Leviticus and other parts of the Pentateuch, no longer apply to the Church, though the underlying principles still have much to teach us. The elaborate sacrificial system has found its fulfilment in the one sacrifice of Christ - the perfect lamb of God - through whom sins are forgiven and atonement is made for all people forever (see Heb 10:1-18).

Exodus

The exodus from Egypt (Ex 1-12) was for the Jews the great saving act of God in history to which all later generations looked back with thankfulness. Later, when Israel was in exile in Babylon, the nation looked for a second exodus (Is 51:9-11). When Christ came, His work of deliverance was described in the language of the exodus (Lk 9:31).

Thus in the Pentateuch we see God calling people to Himself as part of His purposes, entering into covenant relationship with them and revealing Himself to them, giving them moral and ritual guidelines, and acting for their redemption. Indeed, these are themes that run right through the Bible.

The History books

The history books of the Old Testament (from Joshua through to Ezra and Nehemiah) focus on the way in which God's message was fulfilled in the nation of Israel's life, rather than just narrating the history of the nation, since the main aim of the books is to teach.

Joshua covers the period of Moses' successor, Joshua, and describes the conquest of Canaan and the division of Canaan among the twelve tribes.

For almost 200 years from the time when Joshua first led the people across the Jordan, Israel existed as a confederation of tribes, united only in their common covenant with God. There was no central government and no capital city. Each tribe had its own leaders, and all 12 tribes seemed to have had an equal footing. The key times that the tribes came together were the feast days, when they assembled at Shiloh, where the Ark of the Covenant was.

It was trouble that brought the tribes together. At first it gave rise to the **Judges**, whom God raised up to come to the fore in times of danger, rallying the clans against a common enemy. Chief among the Judges were Deborah and Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson. Things might have gone on like that indefinitely had it not been for the Philistine crisis in the eleventh century BC.

1 & 2 Samuel then picks up the story. The Philistines were a well organised, military people who knew how to make weapons and chariots out of iron. They struck a decisive blow against Israel at Aphek, and the ark was captured. Something new was needed to meet the challenge of the hour, and the people called for a king. Saul was the first king. He was succeeded by David, whose reign was a *Golden Age* for Israel (the years around 1000 BC). The kingdom was united and expanded. Jerusalem was captured from the Jebusites and became the capital city. Under David it was a time of peace and prosperity, and God's favour rested on him.

1 & 2 Kings continue the record with Solomon succeeding his father David as king. Under Solomon the Temple was constructed and the kingdom flourished, but on his death the kingdom broke up into a northern kingdom of Israel and a southern kingdom of Judah. The rivalry between these kingdoms continued for 200 years until the northern kingdom's capital city of Samaria fell to the Assyrians. Judah survived precariously for over a century before the combined weight of God's displeasure and Nebuchadnezzar's armies saw the collapse of the southern kingdom, and the people were taken off to exile in Babylon.

The work of the Chronicler: Some of this history is duplicated in the work of a writer or compiler who is often called the Chronicler (Jewish tradition has held that Ezra was the Chronicler). **1 & 2 Chronicles** cover the period before the exile: genealogies from Adam to Saul (1 Chr 1-9), the reign of David (1 Chr 10-29), the reign of Solomon (2 Chr 1-9), and the history of Judah from Rehoboam to the exile (2 Chr 10-36). **Ezra & Nehemiah** cover the first 100 years after the exile, with the return of the exiles, the rebuilding of the Temple and the walls of Jerusalem, Ezra's re-emphasis of the law, and Nehemiah's reforms.

The Israelites were back - but no longer as a nation with her own king. However, the city of Jerusalem, and particularly the temple did give a focus and rallying place for this remnant of Israel as they awaited the fulfilment of the prophet's words that a king of David's line was yet to come.

The Prophets

There are 16 prophetic books in the Old Testament - four major prophets (**Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel**) and 12 minor prophets (the last 12 books of the Old Testament), so called because of their shorter length. These books are quite different to the history books of the Bible.

In their day, the prophets were headline makers in the national news! Unlike priests in Israel whose calling was hereditary, God raised up all sorts of men from various walks of life, to be His voice to the nation. Their task was to call the people back to God's ways, to bring them back when they got mixed up in the religions and wicked practices of neighbouring nations, or whenever complacency and compromise caused people to forget God. This often made them unpopular as they exposed the sin of the nation — including kings — so much so that Jeremiah, for instance, was flogged, tortured, and set on by a lynch mob.

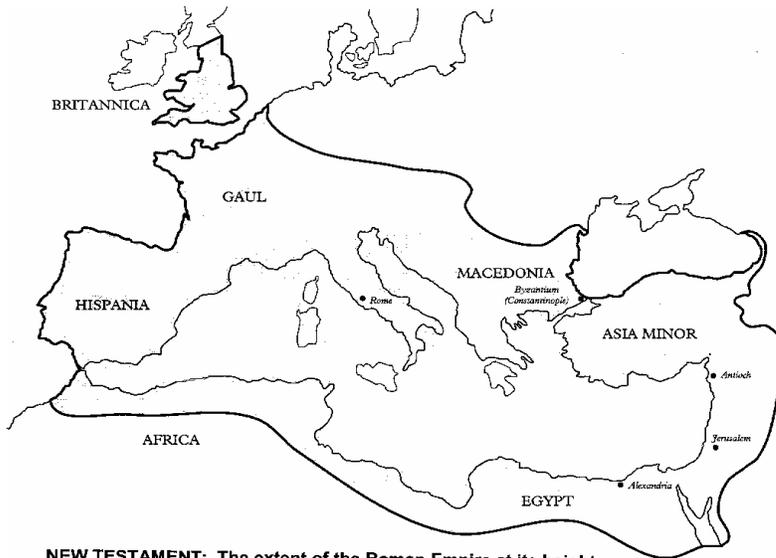
These prophetic books, which occupy quite a large part of the Old Testament, come from a very narrow window in Israel's history - only three centuries covers all 16 books of the prophets (approximately 780-440 BC). This was a time when there was a lack of unity (the northern and southern kingdoms had split from each other) and they were under attack from foreign powers - a time when the voice of the prophets was needed to be heard, loudly, above the secular voices of the day, to reinforce the covenant commitments which were Israel's before God. In Moses' day the role of leader and prophet went hand in hand, but now with kingship in Israel, prophets often had to make a stand against the king.

The New Testament

The New Testament (or *New Covenant*) is God's revelation of Himself to humanity through His Son, Jesus Christ. The New Testament begins with the revelation of Christ, the Son of God, who became Man. His earthly kingdom was not lofty or glorious in people's eyes. His crown was a crown of thorns. He had no palace or other possessions. But the final book of the New Testament gives us a new revelation of Christ - high and lifted up, seated at the right hand of the Father in honour and glory. In His earthly kingdom people mocked Him, spat on Him, placed a crown of thorns upon His head, and crucified Him. But in His heavenly kingdom, we shall gather around His throne and sing with all the saints of all the ages, *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!* That will be the complete revelation of God to man.

The central theme of the New Testament is clearly Christ - His humanity, divinity, and ministry. Christ is presented *historically* in the Gospel accounts and Acts, *doctrinally* in the Epistles, and *prophetically* in Revelation.

New Testament background



NEW TESTAMENT: The extent of the Roman Empire at its height

1. The Roman Empire

By the first century AD the Roman Empire had spread through much of the Mediterranean world, yet the culture of the Eastern Mediterranean remained primarily Greek (especially in the cities). Therefore the world of the New Testament was characterised by Roman power, Greek culture, and Jewish religion. Certain factors were very advantageous for the spread of the Gospel in this context:

- The Mediterranean world was enjoying a period of political stability, peace and prosperity.
- Greek and Latin were languages that were widely spoken.
- The Romans had developed a good road network and postal system, and eliminated bands of robbers from the highways and pirates from the seas.
- The religious world was in a state of flux. The world was, as Paul put it, "*very religious*" (Acts 17:22). People wanted a faith worth following, not an empty mythology, and many were searching for God.
- Since the exile in the sixth century BC, Jews had scattered throughout the Mediterranean world, and in most of the main cities a Jewish community and synagogue existed. This formed a natural network of relationships for the spread of the Gospel.

2. Judaism in the first century A.D.

There were a number of movements among the Jews that were influential in one way or another in New Testament times:

- The **Sadducees** were an upper-class movement concerned to maintain their privileges. They accepted only the Pentateuch as authority, and denied virtually all thought of the supernatural (e.g. resurrection, life after death, angels, demons, etc). Many of the chief priests were Sadducees, and they dominated the Sanhedrin (the Jewish ruling council).
- The **Pharisees** focused on keeping the law and traditions in every exact detail. Their dry legalism which put exact ritual observance before love and mercy, led them into conflict with Jesus. They believed in the immortality of the soul, reward and retribution after death, angels and demons.
- The **Scribes** (lawyers) taught and administered the law. Most scribes belonged to the Pharisee party.
- The **Herodians** were influential Jews who favoured the Herodian ruling dynasty and Roman rule which gave them power.
- The **Zealots** were Jewish freedom fighters who wanted to throw off Roman rule violently. They eventually sparked off the great rebellion which led to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

- The **Essenes** had withdrawn from society and adhered to strict monastic discipline. They studied the scriptures and awaited an end-time conflict in which God would destroy all evil for ever and create a new order in which His faithful people would reign with Him in glory.

The Gospels & Acts

The early church had as their sources of inspiration the sayings of Jesus (passed on orally), the teachings of the apostles and the letters of Paul. As the church expanded, it became important to have a clear written record of the basics - particularly the life and teaching of Jesus. The four Gospels provide us with four different portraits of Jesus:

- **Matthew**, as the teacher to the Jews, focuses on Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah in fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies.
- **Mark** focuses on Christ as the ministering servant to those in need, and concentrates on the suffering of Jesus and its significance for Christian discipleship.
- **Luke** proclaims Jesus as the Saviour of all men; we see Jesus the Man, and God's grace extended to the *least* - the sick and helpless, the poor, women, children, and the social outcasts.
- **John** writes as a theologian, preaching eternal life in Christ, and focusing on great themes such as *The Word*, *The Light of the World* or *The Bread of Life*.

Acts is written by Paul's companion, doctor Luke, as a sequel to the third Gospel. It covers a period of some 30 years from the birth of the Church on the day of Pentecost through to Paul's imprisonment in Rome. The *acts* related are mainly those of the apostles Peter and Paul, though the book might well be called *the acts of the Holy Spirit*, for it is under His direction that the new-born Church bursts through the national frontiers of Israel to become an international, worldwide movement.

The Epistles

In the Epistles (or *Letters*) the apostles were addressing the churches in their care, giving direction, correction and in some cases, answering questions that were being asked. Doctrine was being worked out in practice (e.g. on the question of when Jesus would return, should Christians keep working or give up their jobs in the light of His imminent return; and what about those who were dying prior to Jesus' return, what happened to them, and so on). On all sorts of issues of doctrine and practice, questions were arising, and the unique anointing of those first

apostles is apparent in the inspired way in which they addressed and answered far from simple matters.

Revelation

Although this book stands in a category of its own, one may also call it an epistle, as it is a letter written to specific churches in Asia which John cared for. It is also true to say, as the author himself says, that it is a prophetic revelation. During a time of persecution, John had been banished to the island of Patmos by the Roman authorities in an attempt to get him out of the way. During that time John would have spent much time praying for the churches as they faced persecution.

As he did so, God spoke to John about those churches, about the persecution that was taking place, and about the times that the church as a whole would face before Jesus would come again. Unravelling those three elements and identifying the present, the imminent and the future would have been challenging for John's readers as it continues to be for us! Nevertheless, it was warmly received by churches facing intense persecution, bringing a strong message of assurance, of encouragement, of great hope in the sure knowledge that the kingdoms of this world will bow the knee and become *the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign for ever and ever* (Rev 11:15).

APPENDIX C

SEVEN GREAT MEMORY VERSES ABOUT THE BIBLE

"Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."
(Josh 1v6-9)

*Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.
But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.
Whatever he does prospers (Ps 1v1-3)*

*The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.
The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.
The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.
The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever.
The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous.
They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.
By them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward (Ps 19v7-11)*

*How can a young man keep his way pure?
 By living according to your word.
 I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands.
 I have hidden your word in my heart
 that I might not sin against you (Ps 119v9-11)*

*Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.
 Your commands make me wiser than my enemies,
 for they are ever with me.
 I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes.
 I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.
 I have kept my feet from every evil path so that I might obey your word.
 I have not departed from your laws, for you yourself have taught me.
 How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!
 I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path.
 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path (Ps 119v97-105)*

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3v14-17)

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Heb 4v12)

APPENDIX D

THREE MORE GREAT MEMORY VERSES

*You, O LORD, keep my lamp burning;
my God turns my darkness into light.
With your help I can advance against a troop;
with my God I can scale a wall.*

*As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless.
He is a shield for all who take refuge in him.*

*For who is God besides the LORD? And who is the Rock except our God?
It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect.
He makes my feet like the feet of a deer;
he enables me to stand on the heights.*

*He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze.
You give me your shield of victory, and your right hand sustains me;
you stoop down to make me great. You broaden the path beneath me,
so that my ankles do not turn (Ps 18v28-36)*

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by
him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and
invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were
created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things
hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the
beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he
might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness
dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether
things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood,
shed on the cross (Col 1v15-20)*

*His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness
through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and
goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious
promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature
and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.
For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and
to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-
control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness,
brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess
these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being
ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ
(2 Pet 1v3-8)*

APPENDIX E

SPURGEON AND MUELLER QUOTES

'Would you know astronomy? It is here; it tells you the Sun of Righteousness and the Star of Bethlehem. Would you know botany? It is here; it tells you the plant of renown-the Lily of the Valley and the Rose of Sharon. Would you know geology and mineralogy? You shall learn it here, for you may read from the Rock of Ages and the White Stone with a name graven thereon, which no man knows, saying he that receives it. Would you study history? Here is the most ancient of all the records of the history of the human race. Whatever your science is, come and bend o'er this book; your science is here. Come and drink out of this fair fount of knowledge and wisdom, and you shall find yourselves made wise unto salvation. Wise and foolish, babes and men, gray-headed sires, youths and maidens - I speak to you, plead with you, I beg of you respect your Bibles and search them out, for in them you think you have eternal life, and these are they which testify to Christ.' (Pg 23 'Spurgeon Gold' by Ray Comfort)

'Most people treat the Bible very politely. They have a small pocket volume, neatly bound; they put a white pocket-handkerchief around it, and carry it to their places of worship. When they get home, they lay it up in a drawer till next Sunday morning; then it comes out again for a little bit of a treat and goes to chapel; that is all the poor Bible gets in the way of an airing. That is your style of entertaining this Heavenly messenger. There is dust enough on some of your Bibles to write 'damnation' with your fingers.' (Pg 25 'Spurgeon Gold' compiled by Ray Comfort)

'Defend the Bible? I would as soon defend a lion! Unchain it and it will defend itself!' (Pg 137 'Spurgeon Gold' compiled by Ray Comfort)

I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the word of God, and to meditation on it. . . . What is the food of the inner man? Not prayer, but the word of God; and . . . not the simple reading of the word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water runs through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it, and applying it to our hearts (George Mueller)³²

In what way shall we attain to this settled happiness of soul? How shall we learn to enjoy God? How shall we obtain such an all-sufficient soul-satisfying portion in him as shall enable us to let go the things of this world as vain and worthless in comparison? I answer, This happiness is to be obtained through the study of the Holy Scriptures. God has therein revealed Himself unto us in the face of Jesus Christ (George Mueller)³³

³² Piper. Chap 8, Pg 119, What when I don't desire God; Crossway.

³³ Piper. Chap 8, Pg 118, What when I don't desire God; Crossway.

APPENDIX F

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

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