

- ***READ Joshua 1:6-9*** As the children of Israel were preparing to enter into the promised land, they were told by the Lord that they must be a people who were strong and courageous as they were given possession of the land that was before them. This strength and courage wasn't something that was going to be a result of their own strength, but they were to be strong and courageous because God was going to be with them wherever it was they went.
- Now, it would be nice from the Israelites perspective if that was the end of the conversation, but we must notice that there was something that the Lord expected for them to do if they were going to be prosperous and have great success. The Lord said that they must be a people who did not allow the book of the Law to depart from their mouths. It was to be something that they were constantly meditating upon so that they would be careful to do everything that was contained within it.
- This was the way these people were to go about their lives if they wanted to have success, and we must recognize that things really haven't changed all that much since then. We read in **II Timothy 3:16,17** that *"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."* It all seems pretty simple to me. If we want to have success and prosper, then we must be a people who, like the Israelites, are to have the Word of the Lord constantly on our minds.
- So how does that happen? How can we be growing and prevailing in this manner? We recognize that coming to know God's Word doesn't happen by accident, but it happens when we put in the time and effort to read and study what is contained within it. Seems pretty simple, right? Sure, it is easy to say that all we need to do is study God's Word so we can come to be mature in our knowledge and understanding and so our faiths can grow...but that is something much more easily said than done, isn't it? The truth is that we often run into Bible study problems that prevent us from growing and prevailing and from being prosperous and successful. These problems might be why we wouldn't be able to give a solid defense for the hope that is within us or why we don't have the hope that we ought to have. It might be why we haven't ever stepped up to teach a Bible class or even just teach our neighbor about God. These are real problems that plague real disciples, and they are problems that we must give every effort to overcome.
- This evening, I would like to talk about three specific problems that we might face as Christians when it comes to our Bible study and our efforts to grow in spiritual maturity. Hopefully looking at and discussing these problems and some solutions will help us to reach our full potential as disciples.

I. A lack of motivation and time to study.

A. Motivation and time go hand in hand together.

1. We recognize from other areas of our lives that those things that get us excited, those things that we are motivated to do, those are the things that we are very quick to make sure that we find time to do. We only have so much time in every day. We only have 24 hours, or 1,440 minutes, or 86,400 seconds, and it is up to our discretion as to how those hours, minutes, and seconds will be used. If we really value exercise, we will find time to exercise. If we really value watching that sporting event then we will find time to watch it. And if we really value God's Word and the study of it, then we will find the time to do that, as well.
2. So this problem is probably not rooted in the fact that we don't have enough time, but it is rooted in the fact that we don't value Bible study as we should and therefore we don't find ourselves motivated to put in the time to do it. If we don't see the need to study the Bible, then 99.9% of the time we're simply not going to do it. If we don't see the need to know God's Word then we will more than likely find ourselves weak spiritually and struggling to live as strong and healthy disciples.

- B. If we find ourselves having become tired of our spiritual weakness, then the good news is that there is a solution, but that solution will only be realized if we're ready to put in the effort.
1. Think back to some Scriptures that we have focused on recently when it comes to growth. Think back to **II Peter 1:5-11** where two times in those verses Peter says that if we want to grow then we must make sure we are *"applying all diligence"* and we even *"be all the more diligent"* in these efforts.
 2. Then in the verses that were read for us at the beginning of our assembly, we see Paul reminding Timothy to make sure that he is diligent to present himself approved to God. (**II Timothy 2:15**) This diligence wasn't for no gain, but it was for the purpose of being certain that he wouldn't be ashamed and that he could make sure he was *"accurately handling the word of truth."*
 3. If we want to be a people who can accurately handle the word of truth then that will take some solid and concerted effort in study. It will take some serious time in opening up the book, digging around, and extracting the knowledge and wisdom of God that it contains. I don't know about you, but I don't want to be ignorant of God's Word. I don't want to be someone who cannot answer questions concerning the faith that I confess to have within my heart. I don't want that to be that type of person, and I trust that you don't want to be that type of person either. So if we want to be better disciples because we know God's Word then that will start with us seeing the importance of knowing it and being willing to give the time to do so.

II. A lack of knowing what it means to study.

- A. We hopefully are all motivated to study because we recognize the value of it, but sometimes we run into the problem that we don't really know what it means to study God's Word. Let's begin with what Bible study is not.
1. Firstly, Bible study is not the same as simple Bible reading. While a cursory Bible reading is good and extremely beneficial, it is not the same things as getting into God's Word and digging around to grasp the deeper meanings found within.
 2. At the same time, Bible study does not have to equate to doing what is necessary to be able to write a dissertation of a particular Bible text or subject. If we want to study the Bible, that doesn't mean that we must be fluent or fully knowledgeable about the original languages or know every little historical detail pertinent to what we are studying.
 3. These are really the two extremes that people can gravitate towards when it comes to Bible study, but real, good, and beneficial Bible study can be found somewhere in the middle. It requires more than just a one time read over, but it doesn't demand that we be able to write a 57 page paper on the historical evidence that Paul's thorn in the flesh was actually that he had a crazy stalker chick named Tiffany always trying to get him to date her.
 4. Thinking that Bible study is either one of these things could very well be the problem that keeps us from the true growth that comes from proper Bible study. It could be that we don't actually take a deep enough dive into the meat of Scripture and we just stick to the milk of the Word. In this we keep ourselves from the spiritual nutrition that will allow us to grow. (**Hebrews 6:12-14**) Or it could be that we become very much intimidated with the idea of study because we think it is beyond our ability because we could never write that 57 page dissertation, right? Or it could be that we hear the word "study" and we automatically associate it with schoolwork, and no one really likes having to do schoolwork, so we naturally don't like the idea of having to study the Bible. Both of the extremes are harmful, but the good news is that neither of these are an accurate representation of the type of Bible study that will be of great benefit to the regular everyday disciple like you and me.

B. If Bible study is not these things, then what does Bible study look like, and what can we do to aid in accomplishing it?

1. Bible study, while not simply Bible reading, does certainly revolve around the idea of being in the Book. We can't grow to know more about God and His will for us if we are not actually in the Bible and reading what it is contained within it, but this is only the starting point.
2. Bible study takes Bible reading a step further by taking time to really break down what is contained within the Text. It involves considering context (the who, what, where, when, and how). It involves making connections from one thing a writer wrote to another thing they wrote in another place. It involves being able to piece together a big picture understanding of what is written in the entirety of Scripture. It looks like what we did this morning when we looked at Nicodemus's conversation with Jesus and how Jesus said that Nicodemus should've been able to see what was happening around him. (**John 3:10**) Then we turned and tied it in with what was written way back in **Ezekiel 36** and then we looked ahead to Paul's writings in **Romans 6** and we see the awesome connections between these three texts. Bible study is doing that which more clearly helps us to understand God, His Word, and His will for us.
3. What can help us to accomplish these things? First thing we can do is give some time learning how to study and do these things. Let me really recommend you take some time these first two terms to sit in on Austin's "How To Study The Bible" CTC. This lesson was planned for last Sunday night so I could really plug that class for him, but today will have to do. If you want to get serious about your Bible study and you want to learn more, definitely be a part of that class or at least ask for his material.
4. Additionally, we can use resources that are all around us and easily available. I'm a big proponent of reading what other men have written on different subjects or passages in order to add more water to the pool of understanding. There are many men, even just within our brotherhood, who have written many articles, lessons, and other publications such as commentaries or introduction/overview books that can help us to know God's Word better. Use different study helps such as outlining, color marking, writing notes in your margins, or keeping a notebook of thoughts that you can go back to and reference when the need arises. The main goal is to have as much knowledge and understanding as is possible ready when the need arises. This is the main point of Bible study. It is to know and be able to use God's Word when we are called upon to do so.

III. A lack of knowing what to do with our study.

A. Yet, there is still one problem that we can face as disciples and that is knowing what to do with the fruits of our labor of studying.

1. Again, think about the fact that we sometimes don't study because we only see it as an academic exercise. A preacher friend, Brent Moody, when discussing this subject of why people find it hard to study the Bible, said this, *"Modern school systems have ruined the idea. It is just true. You cram to take a test that supposedly is the measure of your intelligence on a subject. The goal is score, not actual learning. So yeah, 'study' stinks because it is all about making a score and making a grade. We have removed the joy of learning."*
2. How true that is! So often we make our Bible study simply about learning, so we might cram for a Bible class or something of that nature, but once we are done...we don't know what to do with what we learned. What should be our mindset is that we study because we desire to know God's Word better because we know that it can change us into being more Godly in everything that makes us who we are. Our mindset should be much more in tune with the mindset of the author or authors of **Psalms 119**, particularly our mindset should be likened to what is said in **Psalms 119:9-16**. We should find delight in reading, meditating, and growing in knowledge of what is contained within God's Word. It isn't about making a grade, it is about knowing God!

B. We put all of this effort into studying so that we can use that knowledge to live as God would have us to live.

1. Studying God's Word allows for us to be able to accurately handle it. **(II Timothy 2:15)** This means we are able to discern what God tells us is right or wrong...good or evil...acceptable or sinful. Without knowing God's Word, how can we be but ignorant to His will for us?
2. We also study because when we do so we are able to come to know God's truth that will cause us to *"grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ."* **(Ephesians 4:15)** How can one truly be a disciple of Jesus without knowing Jesus? How can we grow to be like Him if we never take the time to learn about Him and His will?
3. When we know these things to be so, then we are able to live a life of security having confidence that what we are doing, as long as it is what we find in God's Word, is pleasing in God's sight. **(Proverbs 6:20-22)**
4. When we put the time and effort in to study, we must constantly remind ourselves that we are doing so for a good and fully beneficial purpose. We are studying to know God's will so that we can do those things that please Him. We don't just study to know, but we study to be able to do. Knowledge without action is useless in God's eyes.

Like Israel, we must be a people who constantly have God's Word on our lips and in our hearts. We must not just know it, but we must actually do it and live it every day. Will that take some effort? Sure it will, but it will be effort that is well worth it because we will see the benefits in our lives. Nothing worthwhile comes without some sacrifice and hard work, and Bible study is no exception. So whether it be for our Bible Classes or for our own personal study times, may we always give great effort to overcome these Bible study problems and be strong disciples of our Lord Jesus.

PRAYER *Our Father in heaven, we pause at this time to praise Your holy name for giving us this Word that contains Your will for us. We thank You so very much that You have created us in such a way that we can read, learn, understand, and live the things that are contained within it, and we are thankful that we can see the benefit of doing so in our lives day by day. We pray that You would help us to keep things within our minds so that we might be dedicated to continual Bible reading and study, and may it be done with the goal of pleasing You and becoming strong in our faiths and more useful in Your kingdom. May our studies this day help us as we go throughout this week, and may we seek Your will for us in all things. Father, we ask that you would bless our shepherds as they lead us closer to You. We ask this all in the name of Your Son, Jesus the Christ...amen.*