

Soul, Survey, and Study

more than a spiritual cup of coffee

Psalm 119:18 Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law

This is the passage that, a few years ago, I was encouraged to pray before I read my Bible each day. God's Word is one of the greatest gifts that we have been given as Christ-followers. As I have traveled around the country seeking to encourage children, teens, and adults, I have been asked repeatedly about reading and studying the Bible. So I decided to write this week's tool on the topic of Bible study, and instead of giving you a plan I would like to offer a framework that was taught to me that has been very helpful as I attempt to get God's Word in my life.

When I first became a Christian at age 14 I knew a couple of things. One, God's word was important so I needed to read it. And two, I have no idea whatsoever where to begin and how to do it. I remember asking friends, teachers, and camp counselors how to go about reading my Bible. Probably the most common answer was to read a Proverb a day to get wisdom from God because there are 31 chapters in proverbs around 31 days in a month so it was perfect! [Note: I'm not slighting this idea because I in fact still do this on occasion as supplement to other devotions, and I continue to recommend it to others] However, it does beg the question, "what about after a month ends?"

How does a new Christian who is overwhelmed with the size of the Bible or a more experienced Christian who is bogged down begin to work his or her way through? Is God's word simply an encyclopedia of Bible and life topics that we can flip through to address specific needs; or is it a treasure trove with precious gems and nuggets for us to dig out; or maybe just a pick me up for each day, comparatively the Christian's spiritual cup of coffee; or could it be a continuous sweeping unified story that reveals God's big picture of life. Although there is some truth to the aforementioned views of the Bible they yield a very lopsided view of the Word. So let me share with you the framework that has been a blessing to me personally and what I hope will be a blessing to you individually as you seek to know your God through His Word.

The framework is wrapped up in three simple words: **soul, survey,** and **study.** When I set up how I'm going to read God's word I always think through these three words. My desire is to make sure that all three of these would be found in my own healthy diet of the Word of God.

Soul – Allowing God's word to be a ministering salve to our hearts

The first part of the framework is actually the one that was the most foreign to me. In fact, I had never approached God's word this way practically until someone pointed this out. There are times and seasons during which we need God's word to

minister to our hearts. In fact God's word is necessary everyday for maintaining spiritual vitality. In Matt. 4:4 while Jesus is under temptation from Satan, he quotes Deut. 8 saying, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" In 1 Peter 2, The word of God is called "sincere milk" that nourishes the believer. God's word is needed for growth, life, and often it is salve to a wounded heart. So how do we allow God's word to be a ministering salve to our needy souls? The first example that I think of practically would be to go to the Psalms. When you are tempted to disbelieve God's love, control, goodness; when it seems like the wicked prosper and the saints are fighting to keep their head above the water (Psalm 73); when you are in sin and need to see the forgiveness of God (Psalm 51), run to the psalms. Allow a proper view of God to encourage your heart through his Word! Do you allow God's Word minister to you in time of need or do you simply suffer through trials on an island by yourself waiting for the clouds to lift? Seek to know God's Word so that you may practically use his words to nourish your soul.

Survey – Taking in Large portions of Scripture

A survey is to by definition, "to take a general and comprehensive view of an area of study" As much as I love verse by verse study, sometimes we can miss the big picture of what God is saying and doing in the grand scheme of that particular passage, chapter, or book of the Bible. Part of the healthy diet of a believer is to take long, deep drinks from the Word. God's word is a continuous account of a sovereign and righteous God and His redemption of man. I would like to suggest that you take occasional time aside to read through an entire book of the Bible in one sitting. The entire book of Genesis can be read in a little over 3 hours, Acts can be read in less than 2.5 hours, and all of Romans is only 1 hr. I will often take breaks from systematic study of God's word to simply survey a book of the Bible. It has become one of my favorite things to do especially if I'm bogged down in a particularly difficult passage.

Study – Digging in to find Gold from God's Word.

It is at this point that we go a little deeper. To study God's word is to intentionally spend time working through a passage to seek out its meaning then and its meaning now. The Bible does not say, "Read the Bible every single day". The Bible says "meditate on God's word day and night" (Josh 1:8, Psalm 1). The fact of the matter is the in some cases reading God's word takes some work! And for vitality every believer needs to be delving into God's word. Go deep! It may take time to look up sermons online, pull out a study bible or use a commentary. But it is worth it! Some diligent work will yield treasure that you cannot find any other way.