

Session Four: Bible Reading Part 1

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[0 : 00] Hey, welcome back to Gospel Growth.

This is our Life on Life discipleship course, and we've been talking about how we grow up in the gospel. And so we're looking at all kinds of things. So far, we've been looking at how we grow together, how God sanctifies us, the beauty and the importance of prayer.

And now we're going to take a few minutes and we're going to talk about something that's a really big deal if you're going to grow as a disciple of Jesus. And that's this idea of reading the Bible. And so this is a massive subject, as you can imagine.

And probably, you know, we're probably, those of us who are watching this, a little all over the place on this. Maybe some of us, you know, we read the Bible all the time and we learn facts when we read the Bible, but we don't really feel ministered to.

We feel informed, but we don't feel changed, you know. Maybe some of us, we read the Bible, but we leave really confused. Every time we go into it, we come out of it with more questions than answers.

[1 : 04] Maybe some of us don't read the Bible very often. And we just feel a lot of guilt and despair and shame whenever the subject comes up. You might've already felt that.

We just said, read the Bible. And you felt, oh, I'm ashamed that I don't do this on a regular basis. You know, and a lot of us, we can look over our shoulders and we can see seasons of us reading the Bible, but those seasons were really driven by guilt and a sense of duty and without really any devotion or joy.

And so we want to talk about these things because I want to go ahead and tell you, that's, I don't think that's what God has in mind for us when it comes to reading the Bible. I don't think that this is the kind of thing God wants us to do every day is, you know, is be driven into this just with a fact-finding mission or fueled by guilt and shame and despair.

That's just not what this is all about. But, you know, we've probably spent a long time, some of us, building habits that reinforce those feelings. And so we're not going to hit everything in this video. We're going to break this up over two videos. The first one we're going to deal with is why we should read the Bible every day. And then we'll get into how we can do that in a way that's really good for our souls. So firstly, let's look at why we do this.

[2 : 17] Why read the Bible every day? Well, there are literally books and books written on this stuff, right? And so rather than try to say everything, that's not really the point of this video.

What I want to do is try to speak to where you might be at and give you some reasons, some rationale why reading the Bible every day would be good for you. The first one of those reasons, we're just going to look at three of them.

The first one is that reading the Bible refreshes our thirsty souls. Reading the Bible refreshes our thirsty souls, right? The Bible paints a picture for us of our souls, who we are, our authentic self, that we're like parched land.

The pressures of work or sin or relationships or stress and circumstances or shame and guilt or whatever, family, all that stuff, those things beat on us like a hot sun.

And so we end up like cracked and parched and in need of refreshing. That's what the Bible tells us we're like on the inside. And when we make it a discipline to come to God's word every day on a regular basis, what we're doing is we're dragging that thirsty soul before the fountainhead of truth and grace and mercy.

[3 : 31] And we're letting that flow over us and heal us and help us. That's why it's good to read the Bible every day, right? Right? We're tasting the steadfast love and mercy of the Lord and we're being reminded about things that really matter, about who God is and how he cares for us.

I love this verse in Psalm 43, five. I'm sure you've heard this before, but look at David drag his soul here before God's presence. And he says, why are you cast down, oh my soul? And why are you in turmoil within me?

That's what it feels like to be human, cast down and in turmoil. That's what it feels like on a regular basis to be a human being. And man, David says, here's what I'm doing with you. Hope in God. I'm gonna take my soul and I'm gonna bring it into the presence of God.

I'm gonna call my soul to hope in him. For I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God. He's reminded of who God is, right? So that's the first really good reason.

The second one, just really quickly, is that reading the Bible makes us love God more. It makes us love God more. One of the worst traps that you and I can get into, if we want despair and shame and guilt to be what's driving our Bible reading, one of the worst traps we can get into is to think that us reading the Bible leads to God loving us more.

[4 : 44] Because when you don't read the Bible, you'll think God loves you less, right? So I read the Bible, God must be, I'm in good standing with him. And you'll start almost getting, you know, magical and mystical about this.

You'll start thinking, oh, good things are happening to me because I read the Bible every day. And oh, bad things are happening to me because I missed a day, you know? And I got a toothache, and oh, it must be because I didn't read the Bible today. You know, we'll get into this rhythm that's just unhelpful and I think unbiblical.

Here's what I will say though, because there's the other pendulum side, which is, oh, I don't have to read the Bible at all because, you know, it's all about grace and mercy. Well, okay, here's what I'll say.

It's true that God doesn't love me more if I read the Bible every day, but it's also true that I love him a lot more when I do. When I come before him on a regular basis, I remember who he is, who I am, who I am in light of him, how much I need him, how much he loves me.

And so I love God more because I spend time with him on a regular basis reading the word. The third reason I'll give you is that reading the Bible shows us who God is.

[5 : 51] Shows us who God is. You know, well, who can say what God's really like? The Bible. The Bible is God's way of showing us who he is. That the Bible is not necessary to know that God exists, but the Bible is necessary to really fill in the blanks about what this God is like, right?

Romans 1 tells us in verse 19 that what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. His invisible attributes, namely his eternal power, his divine nature, these things have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world.

You can look around you and see, man, God, something made this, right? You can see these things in the things that have been made. So they're without excuse, although they knew God, they did not honor him as God and give thanks to him.

They didn't worship him. They became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened. So this is the scenario. As we've got creation, we can see that a God exists and we can get a glimpse of what he's like.

But man, when we get into the word, we see God goes out of his way to reveal himself to us. He wants to be known. He wants to show us what he's like. And he goes so far to show us what he's like that he comes down and puts skin on and reveals who he really is to us.

[7 : 04] So we don't have to play this guessing game. We can see what he's like. Hebrews 1 tells us that that's what happened. Long ago and at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

But in these last days, he's spoken to us by his son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom he also he created the world. He, Jesus, is the radiance of the glory of God.

He is the exact imprint of his nature. He's the exact imprint of his nature. So we're not going, well, there's a sun and there's a moon and there's an ocean. So what's God like?

No, we see Jesus and we see the exact imprint of God's nature. Another reason that I think is really good to read the Bible every day is because reading the Bible can show us what to do with our lives.

Now, this is not what we lead off with. This is not the first reason. This is not the only reason. And I would love to steer you away if you're in the open point sort of style of Bible reading where you just kind of open point.

[8 : 01] I know lots of folks do that, but I would steer you away from that. I think there's better ways to read the Bible. Well, and it can get you into a bad habit where you're obsessed with seeing yourself. However, however, it's worth saying that the Bible, because it helps us understand God's plan of redemption, also helps us understand how we fit into that plan of redemption.

The Bible tells us that we're part of the church, that Jesus has this church, but then we're part of it. We're, you know, we're family. We're a body. We're all those things that we've spoken about. The Bible gives us the blueprint for God's plan, but then that shows us how we fit into it and how we should live in light of it.

So let me give us just a couple of examples. The Bible will call us out of selfish, petty living. So we see this in 2 Corinthians 5, 14, that the love of Christ controls us because we've concluded this, that one has died for all.

The Bible shows us this. Therefore, all have died. The Bible shows us this, and he died for all. Here's what the implication for us is we live in this redemptive plan of God, that we who live might no longer live for ourselves.

So we get called out of selfish living, petty living for us and our own happiness. We get called out of that because we see God's redemptive plan for the world and we go, well, we can't live for ourselves anymore.

[9 : 14] We gotta live for this. One more quick example. The Bible helps call us out of our sin-driven lives. So in Titus 2, 11 through 14, the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.

Again, we got the gospel here. And it trains us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age.

The Bible teaches us how we live right now in this present age, right now. And as we wait for this blessed hope, it's calling us to think about eternity, to live now in light of then because of what Jesus did for us on the cross, right?

The appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us, to purchase us, to ransom us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

We get all this clarity about what our life should look like because we get to see what God's plan is on planet Earth. And we're a part of it, right? Those are just a couple of examples. But if you don't know that, it's good for you to know that God has written you and me into his big story.

[10 : 20] And so we don't pray, God, you know, you know, you get behind my plan. We look at the Bible and we go, wow, God, this is your plan? God, use me. Show me how I fit in this plan. That's what it should feel like to read the Bible.

It doesn't always feel like that. I want to give you three quick tips that I think can really help you. The first thing is to remember that the Bible reads us. We don't just read it, okay? The Bible is a living document.

It's not just words on pages. Hebrews 4 tells us the word of God is living and active. It's sharper than any two-edged sword. It pierces to the vision of the soul and of the spirit of joints and of marrow and it discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

It gets down in there. Who does it do this for? Well, no creature is hidden from his sight. But all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

You and I are going to feel uncomfortable when we read the Bible, but that's because it's reading us. It's getting down inside of us. The word of God gets past all the things that are on the outside, the things that are in our head, the things that we try to put forward to impress people or to convince people that what's not really going on inside of us, that the Bible will cut through all that.

[11 : 29] And so you might feel this makes you uncomfortable because God's speaking to you. God is revealing things about you. And this is not meant to feel like a Ouija board experience, right? This is not some, you know, a scary voice from the grave.

This is the loving voice of the one who conquered the grave. That's a big difference, right? If you're reading the Bible and you feel like it's speaking, you don't have to shut it and like put it under the bed and you're all scared. No, you go, man, this is the one who made me, who loves me, who saved me, who's called me, who's speaking to me.

Like he holds the keys to the grave and he cares about me. We're meant to be comforted by the fact that God speaks to us. The second tip I'll give you is to remember that maturity means we

move from duty to delight.

That's what the journey to maturity looks like, from duty to delight. When we use the word like discipline, like you need a discipline of reading the Bible, a lot of us are just prone to think that means that's a bad thing. That can't be right.

Oh, discipline's got to be wrong, right? But discipline is good for us. A lot of discipline is really good for us. Think about brushing your teeth and flossing and exercising and things like that. Those are good things.

[12 : 34] Those are good disciplines and those things often start off like duty but usually you get to a place of delight. Maybe not with flossing but with most things, right? But we'll see Christians 30, 40 years down the journey of following Jesus and it still feels like it's a duty for them to read the Bible and I would just push on you and say it can be discipline but it should eventually move from duty to delight.

I love how we see it in Psalm 1. Blessed is the man who walks not in his the counsel of the wicked nor stands in the way of sinners nor sits in the seat of scoffers but his delight.

His delight. This is what a blessed man is like. He loves this. He gets joy from the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night. This is a joy to him.

He's not whipping himself into submission. He delights in this. Man, he's like a tree planted by streams of water that yields fruit in its season and its leaf doesn't wither and all he does he prospers.

This is the picture that we get. So this is what Bible reading should feel like but I reckon a lot of times it doesn't and I want to give you the third tip here the last tip which I think is the best tip if you want to move from duty to delight if you don't want Bible reading to feel boring and stale and old if you want to get out of guilt driven Bible reading here's my best tip for you is don't fall in love with the treasure map get to the treasure.

[13 : 58] That's the best tip I can give you. This is really essential for a lot of us and a lot of us don't think about this until way down the road or maybe we never think about this when it comes to following Jesus studying the Bible is great but a lot of times I think we can have what can be called an unbiblical Bible study.

Here's what I mean is that we're studying the Bible but we never get to Jesus and Jesus never gets into our hearts and so this is like what the Pharisees did to a degree in the Bible they seem to think that God would love them because of the loud prayers they prayed or because of how much Bible reading they did but actually Jesus comes and he challenges them on this and I think essentially what Jesus is doing is saying hey you've fallen in love with the treasure map but you've missed me the treasure.

I was thinking about Indiana Jones I grew up loving those movies and how lame would those movies be though if on the way to the treasure Indiana Jones just fell in love with the map and decided he didn't want to actually get to the treasure he just wanted to nobody would watch another version of that movie the sequel would have had no one right because we want we want to get to the treasure and so I think this is what Jesus challenges the Pharisees with and these are some disciplined guys I mean quite a few of them would have memorized all of what we know as the Old Testament many of them would have memorized at least the first five books of the Bible the Torah and so these are disciplined guys and here's what Jesus says to them in John 5 you search the scriptures because you think that it is in them that you have eternal life you think that's what this is all about just searching scriptures it is they that bear witness about me yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life this is a powerful powerful thing here this rocked my world when I first saw this right this is either shockingly arrogant or it's true what Jesus is saying is you've spent years and years of your life memorizing thousands of Bible verses and you missed the point you did all that and you never got to me he actually tells them before he says those verses I read you can go look at it he says that you've never once heard

God's voice and God's word does not live in you they've memorized thousands of Bible verses and God's like God's word's not in you because you don't come to me right and so you've turned this into something that's never meant to be this is a map that's meant to lead you to me but you've fallen in love with the map how many of us Christians do this we make Bible reading about fact finding instead of treasure finding the Bible is not an encyclopedia but a lot of us probably grew up learning to memorize facts and you know random you know just trivia about the Bible so we could win competitions and those things are fun and fine I guess but like they can they can begin to lead

us to think that that's what the Bible is just a book full of facts and so we read it like an encyclopedia and that's not what the Bible is the Bible isn't a yearbook either I mean we can see ourselves in there but man we're not just looking for ourselves we're looking for Jesus I don't want to see more of me I want to see more of him that's what I need right and the Bible isn't a self-help guide either we've all got problems and a lot of times those problems drive us into wanting to read the Bible and that's great but man the Bible isn't there just to deliver some you know pithy statements about how you and I can be the best version of ourselves no the Bible is this living word of God that's meant to bring us before the feet of the cross again and again where we behold the love and the mercy of God on display in Jesus and to fill us with hope and courage and love for others as we follow him that's what the Bible is meant to do for us again and again so

I'm excited for you guys to get in your group discussions I mean I'd love you to among the other things that you'll probably do to talk about how you've read the Bible in the past was it you know a treasure map was it an encyclopedia was it a self-help guide talk about you know what drove you to read the Bible in the past was it pride was it despair was it guilt was it a sense of competition was it just duty and then just pray for each other and encourage each other God bless you guys to see Thank you.