

40 Days #1:

Why is the Bible so Important?

(Psalm 119:9, 105)

October 2, 2005

I want to start today by just reading two verses from the longest chapter of the Bible, Psalm 119:

*9How can a young man keep his way pure?
By living according to your word.*

*105Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light for my path.*

Psalm 119 is one very long meditation on the written word of God. It's divided into 22 sections, one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Each of those sections consists of eight verses, each of which start with that letter of the Hebrew alphabet. If it were in English, each verse in the first section would start with 'A'; each in the second section would start with 'B', and so forth on to 'Z'. That makes for a total of 176 verses. *And each and every one of those verses mentions the power and the wonder of the written word of God, the Scriptures, the Bible.*

Clearly, the unnamed Psalmist who composed this masterpiece considered the Scriptures to be very important. There's nothing he can say that's good enough. This is the "default setting" of the Bible: to proclaim itself not just another religious book or work of philosophy, but to be the written word of God, and trustworthy in all dimensions.

Now, next week, I'm going to focus on the very important idea of the **inspiration** of Scripture. I think it's important that we understand what words like *inspired*, *inerrant* and *authoritative* mean when they come to the Bible. This week, though, I want to start the

core weeks of the Forty Days of the Bible with thinking about the role of the Bible in the life of the believer.

Last summer, in July, we spent four weeks considering the role of prayer in the life of the Jesus follower. From the Lord's Prayer, we were able to identify four things that God wants to accomplish in our lives through prayer: praising God, longing for God, being dependant on God and empowered by God. That's at the core of what God wants to happen within us as we move forward as people of prayer. Now, what does God want to accomplish in us as students of Scripture? What is it He wants to happen in us as we dig deep into the Word of God?

I want to suggest five things that God wants to accomplish in our lives as we move forward as students of His word:

- 1. He wants to mature our understanding of Himself**
- 2. He wants to mature our understanding of ourselves**
- 3. He wants to mature our understanding of this world we live in**
- 4. He wants to mature our understanding of what it means to be right with God**
- 5. He wants to mature our understanding of the total sufficiency of His word**

First,

- 1. He wants to mature our understanding of Himself**

God's *first* objective in giving us the Bible, and in our reading, study, meditation and application of His word is that we get a good glimpse of Himself. The Bible is all about God

revealing Himself to us. It's not the story of humanity search for God. It's not the record of various teachers' thoughts about God. It is the story of God revealing Himself to us.

We just read Psalm 119:105: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." We can read that in a kind of limited way: "Your word is for me, me, me!" or I think in a way that's much more faithful to whole testimony of Scripture: "Your word shows me everything I really need to know about anything that's important." And the beginning of wisdom, according to Proverbs 1:7, is the reverent fear of God. He is the hub, the center of all truth and knowledge.

But what about Jesus Himself? I've often said, "If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus." Look at His love, His character, His patient, His tact, His compassion. Ah, but here's the trick. Where outside of the Gospels, the four books of the Bible that tell His story, will you find the personality of Jesus displayed for us? No where! Not the in downright silly so-called Gospel of Thomas or any of the other crackpot writings that were rightly rejected by the early church. You won't find the truth about Jesus anywhere but right here. You find the story, the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, about Jesus Christ, right here in the Bible.

The Bible is often called the Written Word of God, and Jesus is the Living Word of God. The written word and the living word are in 100% agreement with each other. If I want to know Jesus better, if I want to grow in my faith, if I want to advance in my relationship with God, it will be with an open Bible before me.

And we can have confidence that God will speak to us clearly through that word. As a matter of fact, the *clarity* of Scripture is a very

important doctrine. We believe that God does use a hidden code in the pages of the Bible. The same rules of understanding that we use when reading a magazine or a novel apply. What kind of God would reveal Himself in a book only scholars could understand?

Pick up a letter of Paul. Take Philippians. Read it through. He expected the Philippians to be able to understand it and to act on it. There aren't any hidden passages or trap doors in it. Psalm 19:7b says, "The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple." The simple? Yep, the simple. You don't have to be a genius to understand the Bible. 95% of its meaning is lying right out on the surface.

Sure, there's a place for Bible scholarship. They're there to teach and to dig into the historical background and to work on the 5% that's not right on the surface. But as we learned from that story about Donald Whitney and that church in East Africa, even the simple presence of Bibles transformed a people. Scripture is clear, and it clearly tells us first and foremost what God is like. And that is necessary if we are to be people of praise. He wants us to praise Him with a full firm understanding of His nature and ways.

2. **He wants to mature our understanding of ourselves**

James 1:22-25 says,

*22Do not merely listen to the **word**, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23Anyone who listens to the **word** but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror 24and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25But **the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and***

continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does.

The second power of God's word in our lives is that it tells us the whole truth about ourselves. We get the whole scoop about sin, about salvation, and about what God wants to do in our lives, through the word of God.

Ever look in a mirror—really close? I don't know about you, but when I do that, my face is about as craggy as the far side of the moon. That's why I don't stay there very long. It's not very flattering.

The person who looks intently into the word of God sees the whole truth about what it means to be a human being. We see that we were created in God's image, and so have an incredible value to God. We also see that we're fallen sinners and are separated from God. We see that God loved us, each individually, that He sent His Son on a bloody rescue mission for us.

We see as well both the evil we are inclined to and the dream God has for us. In God's word, we see the full truth about ourselves. And it's a more full, exact and realistic truth than anything you'll find in psychology, anthropology or physiology. It's the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. In the light of God's word, we can, really for the first time, see ourselves.

3. He wants to mature our understanding of this world we live in

The Bible gives us the essential information we need to understand and make it in this world. There are two big pieces of the puzzle about the world that the Bible supplies. First, God created the world. It's His work of art.

He made it and said, "It's very good!" That's what He says in Genesis 1:31. But then, when our first parents chose rebellion against God, the world became a damaged place. Paul says in Romans 8:21-22 that the world is now in a state of "bondage to decay" and that it groans in anticipation of the good things to come.

But the most important thing about the world that the Bible tells us is the spiritual need of the all the peoples of this world. From beginning to end, the Bible proclaims that God has a plan for the entire world to hear and believe the good news. The Psalmist prays in Psalm 67:1-2:

*1 May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face shine upon us,
2 that your ways may be known on earth,
your salvation among all nations.*

And Jesus tells us in Matthew 8:11:

*I say to you that many will come from the
east and the west, and will take their places at
the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in
the kingdom of heaven.*

A Biblical Christian is a World Christian. The mandate of the Word of God changes the way we think about the world we live in.

In my first church, a tiny little church in Western Pennsylvania, the very first time we had a chance to have a real live missionary speak, I was so excited that I called up every family in the church. (That was only about 20 calls!) One lady I spoke to said straight out that she didn't support world missions because "we have enough problems here in America." I thought my heart stopped for a second. How could anybody believe that? God's mission is as broad as God's heart, and

His mission was, is and will always be worldwide in scope. God's word gives us God's own perspective on the world we live in.

4. **He wants to mature our understanding of what it means to be right with God**

Where else are you going to get the straight story on what it means to be right with God, and to stay on the path of growth? Will you get it from a theologian's opinion, or a church council, or from your personal reflection?

You can't talk about the role of the Bible in the life of a Jesus follower without touching on the issue of the Bible in the Reformation. Martin Luther realized that because all human institutions, including the church, were full of contradictions about the way to be made right with God, while the Bible spoke with complete clarity. He was hauled before church authorities and with fear and trembling said these words:

"Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they all contradict each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen."

God gave us the Bible to be a compass of truth. A compass will always point to Magnetic North. If He had entrusted His saving truth to imperfect human memories, we would have messed it up. I know that for a fact, because when those centuries rolled by with so little knowledge of the Bible but a powerful church, the people who led the church gradually distorted and twisted Scripture until the simple pure powerful message of Jesus became

unrecognizable. It was like a ship at sea, with so many barnacles attached that it could barely move. Then God sent the Reformation, not to tell us a new thing, but to scrape off the barnacles of human traditions and distortions to get back to the New Testament message.

So God has given us His truth to enable us to know how to be made right with God, and how to continue on the path of discipleship. It's the unchanging "control," separate from any human authority that knocks down human traditions, distortions and misunderstandings. Without it, we'd be lost at sea.

Finally,

5. **He wants to mature our understanding of the total sufficiency of His word**

One last thought: as we grow as students of the word of God, one of the things that happens in us is that as time goes on, we see how God's word speaks to more and more of what we do and what we are. We see how it's relevant to just about everything. I mean, it's not going to give you guidance on what kind of tortilla chip to buy, but it's amazing how much it does speak to everyday life issues as well as some of the most contentious issues in society.

Theologians call this the doctrine of the **sufficiency** of Scripture. That means that the Bible contains in its teachings everything we need in order to understand how a person is made right with God, everything we need to trust Him fully, and everything we need to obey Him completely.

Because God's word is truly **sufficient**, we don't need a church council, a Book of Mormon, a *Science and Health* (the guide in

the Christian Science cult) to add to the teachings of Scripture. We don't look to any human institution or creation to give us authoritative teaching on doctrine (what we believe) or morals (how we live). The word of God is **sufficient**.

So when we face a personal decision, do we turn to a radio psychologist, or to the word of God?

When we ponder a tough social issue, do we turn to a university ethics professor or to the word of God?

And when we consider what's right and wrong, do we check our feelings, look within and let our conscience be our guide? No: we turn to the all-sufficient word of God as our unerring guide. Amen?

Is this the way the world teaches us to think? No—it says that you have all the answers within you. Well, wish it were true but it isn't. We need a sure guide outside of ourselves.

In 1928, a man by the name of Frank Morris stepped off a boat in New York with his dog named Buddy. The press was there because Buddy, trained in Switzerland, was the first seeing-eye dog in America. The press was skeptical; the very idea was new and totally unknown in the US. One suggested a test: to take Buddy to a busy street in Manhattan and to see if he could really guide Frank across eight lanes of traffic.

Frank felt Buddy tug him out into the street. One lane, two lanes. He could feel the *whoosh* of truck go by, just a few feet away. Buddy tugged again, and again. More stops. More whooshes. Finally they arrived safely on the other side. The skeptical reporters applauded.

Buddy was guidance outside the wisdom and ability of Frank Morris. Buddy could see what Frank could not see. And Frank had to trust Buddy—in this case, with his life.

God's word is guidance beyond our wisdom and ability. The Scripture reveals what we cannot see. And we as must trust, have to trust and listen. God is speaking. Listen.

END
PRAYER