

GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR BIBLE

THE BIBLE AND THE CLOSET or *How We May Read the Scriptures with the Most Spiritual Profit* circa 1670 by Rev. Thomas Watson
this abridgement by John Miller, Staines Baptist

Puritan bible teachers knew how to go deep without losing their readers. Setting aside their classical illustrations and Latin quotes reveals rich and relevant truth!

When he sits on the throne of his kingdom [the king] shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law ...and it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them (Deuteronomy 17:18-19)

The first priority of the ancient kings of Israel was to know God's word and obey everything it commanded. Reading God's word is a great way to understand the "fear of the Lord," the beginning of true wisdom.

Jesus warned us against bible ignorance, saying "You are wrong, because you do not know the Scriptures ... (Matthew 22:29) and he tells us we must search the scriptures: "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me. (John 5:39)

If you had been left something in a will you would want to know what or how much, wouldn't you? We should feel the same about our Father's word to us.

And we are fortunate because we have the bible in our own language and the freedom to read it.

We must eat the fruit of the tree of scripture or we will die. Despite the value of the bible many people who claim to be Christian have a better knowledge of thrillers and romantic fiction than they do the bible. They spend more time watching the TV than reading God's word. "Whoever despises the word brings destruction on himself" (Proverbs 13:13)

But it isn't enough just to read the bible; we must get spiritual nourishment from it as well. Here are no less than twenty four top tips to help you do just that.

TWENTY FOUR TOP TIPS

1. Get rid of things that will stand between you and bible truth.
 - a. Sin is the number one problem; it is a bacteria that will poison you even while you are reading the bible.
 - b. Distracting thoughts or what Jesus calls "the cares of this world" (Matthew 13:22) will catch you out. We can be attracted to material and temporal gifts so much that we stop wanting eternal, spiritual blessings from God.
 - c. Be serious about the bible; this isn't a joke!
 - d. A half-hearted approach to bible reading isn't likely to squeeze much benefit out of the bible.
2. Make sure you have prepared your heart. It is like an instrument that has to be tuned before

you can play it. Gather your thoughts carefully. People who *come* to the bible without preparation *leave* it without profit.

3. Be reverent in your attitude. This is God speaking to you. When he spoke in Exodus 20 the Israelites were forbidden even to touch the mountain and the Levites were ordered not to touch the ark of God (Exodus 25).
4. Be consistent and methodical in your reading; don't dot about. An ordered approach is more likely to encourage understanding and memory. When you get an email from a friend you read it methodically so that you can understand what they are saying.
5. "Give me understanding that I may learn your commandments" (Psalm 119:73). Although some parts of the bible appear hard to

understand you shouldn't give up. And you can always ask someone to help!

6. Take it seriously. If you just glance over it quickly you are not likely to profit. And your eternal happiness hangs on this. You expect the pharmacist to read your prescription carefully so when God prescribes something for your soul read it carefully; the medicine is Jesus Christ! If you want to know the "love that surpasses knowledge" you should read carefully. If you want "to avoid the fires of hell" read the bible with great care.

7. Remember what you have read. Satan would love to snatch it away from your mind so hold on to it. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Colossians 3:16). You can't profit from it if you don't remember it. You seem to be able to store up all sorts of trivial gossip so why not God's word?

8. Think carefully about what you have read. Chew it over in your mind. Fix your thoughts on the verses and ponder them in your heart like Mary did when the angel spoke to her. When you meditate your mind is breathing in the oxygen it need.

9. Be humble. You might have read a passage many times before but you can still learn something new. Pride is the enemy of profiting. It's as though you are saying "this can't teach *me* anything."

10. Believe what you read; accept it as true. "All Scripture is breathed out by God" (2 Timothy 3:16). No one but God could reveal the secrets of the trinity, the atonement and the resurrection. The bible is from God. It isn't the lies of sinners or the ravings of saints. Even angels would not dare to impersonate God or speak without his authority.

11. Value the scripture highly. "The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces" (Psalm 119:72). Every verse of the bible is a treasure trove of truth. The bible tells us about heaven, it warns us of the danger of sin, it is the antidote to wrong thinking, it is the sword that slays our ancient enemy and a strong tower in which we can shelter.

12. Love God's word with all your heart, more than anything else. The psalmist says "I love your law."

13. Bring an honest heart to God's word. Be willing to know and accept *all* of God's truth. Accept that you need to be made better and that God's word can have a deep, positive impact on your life.

14. Learn to apply the truth of scripture to your own life. So when the bible rages against sin God means *your* sin. When the bible imposes a duty on disciples God is telling *you* to do it. To profit from something you have to make it your own.

15. Listen to the instructions of God's word as well as the promises. If you concentrate just on the wonderful promises you will miss the important commands that God gives you. If you haven't listened to the whole counsel of God you could have a false sense of security.

16. Think most about the more significant parts of the bible. All of scripture is excellent of course but some passages are more emphatic; understanding genealogies aren't as important as understanding new birth for instance. If you read out of curiosity you will be busy but you won't necessarily get any spiritual profit from what you read. Digging deep into the temporal things in the bible will rob you of the opportunity to investigate the eternal things.

17. Compare what the bible says about things with how you feel about them. Is your heart a transcript of bible truth and attitude? Are you humbly submitting to God's thinking? Has reading the bible ever changed your mind about something? Do you love grace even when it seems unfair? Do you hate sin even when it seems unavoidable?

18. Pay particular attention to the scriptures that seem to talk about your circumstances.

- a. If you are in trouble read passages like these: Heb. 12:7, Isaiah 27:9, John 16:20, or 2Cor. 4:17
- b. If you are in low spirits read Isaiah 54:8, 57:16 and Psalm 97:11
- c. If you are tempted to sin look at Galatians 5:24; James 1:15; 1Peter 2:11; Proverbs 7:10, 22, 23; 22:14.
- d. And if you are prey to unbelief read Isaiah 26:3; 2 Samuel 22:31; John 3:15; 1John 5:10. John 3:36.

The point is that there are bible passages that can speak directly to your circumstances.

19. Bible examples are especially important because they teach us about God's character, how he works and what we can expect from him. Examples of God's judgement are powerful reminders of his justice. If Nebuchadnezzar was judged for his pride you should not be proud. The many examples of mercy should be a great encouragement. Jeremiah was kept safe in his appalling imprisonment.

20. Keep reading the bible until your heart has been warmed. "I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life (Psalm 119:93). God's story is a great narrative and a true history but it should move you deeply. Bible reading shouldn't just inform you, it should inflame you! Read until you can say like the disciples who said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" (Luke 24:32)

21. Don't just read it; do what it says; it is more satisfying to perform life-saving surgery than to be an expert in anatomy who does nothing. The bible is not just a light to see by, it is a lamp to

walk by. It is through doing what the word says that we get real spiritual profit.

22. Ask Jesus himself to help you understand what you are reading. The Lamb is worthy to open the seals and reveal God's purpose! "[Jesus] opened their minds to understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45). Light and heat are closely connected. If you have one you'll generally get the other. Ask Jesus for the light of understanding and you will get the heat of spiritual blessing.

23. Listen to bible teaching with a critical ear. Preachers are not perfect and can sometimes make mistakes or just be plain wrong.. If you think it is good teaching try to think why it's good. And if you think!

24. Pray! Before you read the scriptures ask God to give you some real spiritual profit from what you read. Ask Him to unveil truth and speak to your heart, to challenge and change you. "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law (Psalm 119:18). The most fabulous motor car in the world can't go anywhere without fuel; ask God to fill you up with his Spirit of wisdom and revelation.

Those are my top tips for reading the bible. Here are a few final thoughts.

Don't be satisfied simply with reading the scriptures. Look for some tangible spiritual improvement or profit. Make sure that God's word is inscribed on your heart; the law of his God is in his heart; his steps do not slip. (Psalm 37:31). The best and most secure Christians are those who both read *and* profit from their reading.

If you have profited from reading the scriptures it is because you have uncovered their treasure. That's a good sign that you truly belong to Christ. Bless God that he has shone his light into your life and given you eyes to see that light.

Some Christians do not get spiritual profit from reading God's word. Since sick people need medicine to help them get better here are some prescriptions for the sick Christian.

- You might not do as well as someone else but you get *some* benefit from it. The ground that yielded thirty times what was sown was

good ground. Even a small spiritual yield suggests that you have a new heart.

- You don't have to be particularly clever to learn from God's word. The disciples couldn't grasp the full enormity of Christ's death because "it was hidden from them." Even a little bible understanding is a valuable hoard of treasure.

- Being able to remember what you have read isn't the same as profiting from it. Have you got a "leaky" memory? Well, you can still have a good heart. Even though you may not remember everything you can recall what matters most. At a buffet you don't have to taste everything to enjoy the meal. A lamp may not be full of oil but it can still burn and give a good light. That's you! Even though your memory is not full of scripture at least you can remember enough to burn with love for God.

So cheer up! You *do* profit from your bible reading. And remember Jesus' promise to you: "The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26)