

XXIV. Timeless Truth for Timely Topics in Biblical Perspective

What Does the Bible Say?

“Personal Worship and Bible Study”

Psalm 1

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III

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We will look at four texts in this study and then I'll do a distillation from these texts concerning personal worship and Bible study. We are doing this because of a rubric in the Bible. Acts 17:11 says *[11] Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.* In this passage Paul identifies the believers there as noble-minded and even more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica where he had just left. He gives two things that make them noble-minded. One they were noble-minded because they received the Word with eagerness. In other words, they had a teachable heart and they had prioritized the preaching of God's Word knowing that faith comes by hearing and hearing the Word of Christ. Their teachability wasn't manifested by being so teachable or open-minded that their brains would fall out but on the contrary they were very discerning. When they listened to the preaching they had another priority in their life and that was they examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. So that text tells us they had a daily time that they read intentionally and intensely God's Word. They examined the Scriptures and thirdly they were discerning in their study. Fourthly, they were regular in their study.

Now assuming by God's grace you have said before the Lord that you want to prioritize the hearing of God's Word and secondly you want a vibrant, effective time of daily examination and study of God's Word as you come before the Lord personally to worship Him. Our campus outreach ministry would call this daily examination of the Scripture – TAWG, which meant time alone with God. This is what the Acts text brings out but now let's go a step further by looking at a couple of other texts and then I'll do a distillation giving five disciplined principle practices and five practical practices from these texts. Now let's look at II Timothy 2. Here Timothy as the pastor at Ephesus is charging those in the church.

II Timothy 2:14–15 says *[14] Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. [15] Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.* The one who prioritizes the preaching of the Word is one who is supposed to be examining it daily. That's why God also tells us in I Timothy 5 that He has set up the church to support the pastor so that he can work hard and preaching and teaching, to rightly handle the Word of God under the eye of God.

God is so amazingly insightful. God puts pastors in a place where the people support them but then He tells them not to preach for the people to support you. Study to show yourself approved unto God. The pastor has to exercise the discipline not to preach for the smiles of people for if you do then you'll stop preaching when they frown. Pastors preach for the smile of God so that God approves their handling of the Word but in that what is true of the one preaching would be true of those who have heard the preaching.

When you go to examine the Scriptures daily to hear what you've heard preached you need to handle the Word accurately. That is a term that we get orthopedics from. You cut it straight so that when you go to a text, study it looking at all its implications and applications for

its doctrine, reproof, correction and training in righteousness, then the text fits right back into the context. You haven't over embellished it nor have you under sold it. You handle it accurately. All of us live for approval. You can forget the drivel of the song 'I did it my way.' Those who do it 'my way' are actually doing that which the world says is the right way.

So our question is will we do it the world's way or will our mind be transformed and renewed through preaching and Bible studies so that we do it God's way in Jesus who is The Way, The Truth and the Life? While the believer is certainly appreciative of any approval from others, ultimately lives for the approval unto God. Allister Begg said "As my dad and mom taught me, you are to study God's Word and the degree you are looking is AUG which is approved unto God."

Let's look at a third text to Ezra 7. Ezra is a very rich book and I recommend you spend as much time in this book as you can. Ezra was a man God used for a great revival throughout the nation of Israel when they were restored from the Babylonian captivity. They had a great governor in Zerubbabel, another in Nehemiah and a great high priest named Joshua. Haggai and Ezra were some of their great prophets as well. Ezra was the one who was mostly the teacher. How was Ezra able to be effective? How can I be effective teaching my children? How can I be effective as a pastor teaching God's people? How can you be effective teaching others in a small group? Here is what he says.

Ezra 7:10 says *[10] For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law (books of Moses) of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.* So Ezra's effective ministry flowed from a text that says one that he was intentional to study the Bible for he set himself. In order to be effective he set himself to study the Scripture. He made it an intentional commitment to plan the study of God's Word. Secondly, he did this from his heart. This was a heart matter for him. Thirdly, he studied. Four, he studied the law of the Lord. Five, he studied it first to do it. In Acts 1:1, which was the second volume of Luke, says *[1] In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach.* Jesus was the perfect model of the Ezra model. First know the Word it, then do it and then to teach it. Then communicate it to others. That means Ezra would teach God rules and statutes among God's covenant people in Israel. So there is a heart commitment to study, a heart commitment to study God's Word, a heart commitment to study God's Word to obey it and teach it and then be able to communicate it.

Now let's look at II Peter 3. In this text we are told something very insightful. One is that Paul's writings are identified as Scripture in this text. II Peter 3:14–18 says *[14] Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. [15] And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, [16] as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. [17] You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. [18] But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.*

I love to emphasize this. He doesn't say grow for grace but he says to grow in grace. It is not you grow and God will be gracious but it's God has been gracious to you so now you work out what He is working in. You grow in His grace and not for His grace. What is one thing that you need to do to grow in grace? You need to know the Scriptures – the Old and New Testaments. You need to know the Word of God to grow in the grace of God. Do you think

Satan knows that you need to know the Word to grow? So if he can't distract you from it so it's not a priority in your life – preaching and Bible study – then he'll try to get false teachers and preachers who twist the Scriptures. They will twist them first on secondary doctrines and then eventually undermine primary doctrine. He calls it the ministry of unprincipled men who have become Satan's instruments to lead people astray with false teaching.

That's why Paul said to the church at Ephesus that when I leave you be aware because Satan will come in among you with leaders who will lead the sheep astray to themselves and who will teach false doctrine. So you always want to be careful to not only prioritize preaching but be careful about what preaching you listen to. Everything you need to know is ultimately in the Bible but not everything in the Bible is as clear as other things. He says there are things in the Bible that are hard to understand. Have you read something in the Bible that was hard to understand? If you haven't then you have not read the Bible. Sure there are things that are hard to understand, take the book of Proverbs when it says do not answer a fool according to his folly. If you keep reading it says to answer a fool in his own folly lest he be wise in his own eyes. So Solomon do I answer the fool and or not? That is what we call an antithetical parallelism and that requires some study. There are all kinds of things in the Bible that are hard to understand.

So what do you do? If you're under appropriate preaching that will be helpful. Get a good library. Since the Scriptures are clear in God's Word, the Scriptures cannot contradict themselves. So where there is something hard to understand where do we go for the final verdict? We go to the Scriptures. It is our final authority for faith and practice. So if I have a tough text and I know that God's Word can't contradict itself I go to the simpler text in order to understand the more difficult text. It doesn't mean that I don't use commentaries or spiritual mentors I have in my life or seek wise counsel on it but ultimately and finally the Word of God is what settles the issues on these tough texts. Let's look now at Psalm 1.

Charles Spurgeon called Psalm 1 the beatitude of the Old Testament. This is one of my favorite Psalms. I once did a series of 27 sermons on Psalm 1 as a student pastor. Then I went to serve in a church in Miami, Florida and went to hear a mentor of mine, Jim Baird, who happen to be preaching on Psalm 1 as well. I heard two things from him that I had never seen in the text. God's Word is so rich and the deeper you go the purer the water, the deeper you go the richer the nuggets. Not only is God's Word unfathomable but texts in God's Word are ultimately unfathomable because of the way they are connected to everything else.

Psalm 1:1 says [1] *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.* In other words, he is careful about his counsel – he doesn't sit in the counsel of the wicked. He is careful about his conduct – he doesn't walk in the way of a sinner. He flees temptation. He doesn't make his resident fellowship among the mockers – he doesn't sit in the seat of scoffers. It doesn't mean he doesn't reach out to them but that is not his settled seat of fellowship.

Psalm 1:2–6 says [2] *but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.* [3] *He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.* [4] *The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.* [5] *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;* [6] *for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.*

We are supposed to delight in God's Word. Remember Ezra set his heart so we are to delight in God's Word. Then He tells us to meditate in God's Word. The Hebrew word for meditation can also be translated into a word in our language that is rumination. Cows ruminate.

Green grass – brown cow – white milk – how does that happen? The cow chews and chews and chews on the grass. Then the cow swallows it and a few seconds later they throw it back up and chew it again because there was more goodie to get. They will do this three to five times with a mouth full of that grass. That's rumination – you chew it, swallow it, bring it up and do it again and again. This is how we meditate on the Word of God. I'm not talking about Eastern Religion meditation for that is emptying your mind but Biblical meditation is filling your mind.

People may not like what I'm about to say for people ask me about yoga. Many of them tell me they do Christian yoga. That's impossible. The whole regiment exercise is built upon meditation and it is the meditation taught in Hinduism. Any time an exercise requirements meditation to accomplish it then you have an issue. You need to really think through it. It's really interesting why they paid \$500,000 to mount a campaign to introduce it to the children in the public schools of California. That's whole other issue but you and I need to do Biblical meditation. We are not emptying our minds to contort our lives for we are filling our minds to conform our minds to Christ. We are to be thinking our way through the texts, reflecting on it, contemplating on it, examining it, reading it, meditating on it.

After looking at those particular texts I will outline for you some practical takeaways from them. Here are five principled practices for personal Bible study and worship in light of these five texts we have looked at. Number one when we do personal Bible study and worship read out loud with emphasis, rotation and outline the text. Do you remember in school when your teacher taught you how to outline a sentence? Use it in your personal Bible study. Here's the noun, the verb, the object. This is not a magic book. It is a book to be studied. This book is baby talk for Him but God communicates clear talk for us. So read it, examine it, read it out loud and read it with emphasis.

This morning in a class I was teaching I read from II Timothy 1:12 which says *[12] which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.* There were five points to the sermon I did on this and the sermon came from just reading it out loud and outlining it. First I read it out loud and emphasized the nouns, then the pronouns and the verbs. It was like a light came on and I realized I'm supposed to live intentionally and accurately for Christ with dependence upon Him. So work your way through the text and read it out loud slowly. Read it thoughtfully. Outline it. Take your time with it.

Number two look for the Christ-centered focus. Jesus says in John 5:39, *[39] You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.* Where is Christ being displayed in the text? It is the preeminence of Christ to see the glory of our Triune God. Find that in the text.

Thirdly, secure some good commentaries and study helps. I think one of the greatest things you can give to your children is the knowledge of Jesus Christ and then a great library. Use good commentaries on the whole Bible and good study helps to help you work your way through the Scriptures.

Four, is make use of meditation, memorization, contemplation and reflection. As you study the Bible take the time to meditate on what you've just read. Work your way through it. Go back to those nouns, pronouns and verbs. Look at that outline again. Then contemplate on it and ask 'where is Jesus here?' How is this text pointing me to Jesus? I don't want to read Jesus into the text. How is this Old Testament taking me to Jesus? How is this New Testament text explaining Jesus, the preeminence of Jesus as my Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer to the glory of the Father and the surrender to the Holy Spirit? I would suggest memorizing just one verse a

week. Do John 3:16 this week. Get started for by the end of the year you would have memorized 52 verses. *[11] I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.* (Psalm 119:11)

Then contemplate and reflect as you sit before the Lord and work your way through the text. What is my Savior telling me here? Where is the trajectory of this in my life? The Scripture is profitable for teaching and reproof so how is this text reproving me? Where am I out of sorts with this text? Correction – how can I line up with this text in my life? How can I do it like Ezra? Then do it. Training – what can I do in my life so that this Word is incarnated in my life, living for Christ? How can this be at work in me?

Five is Analogia de Fide, meaning analogy of faith. What do I mean by that? By faith the evidence supports it that the Bible is the Word of God. So when you get to a tough text you are going to get help through commentaries, friends, or teachers but ultimately to handle that tough text I want to go to the simpler text to understand the tough text. I know this is the Word of God and by faith I have believed the Word of God as the Word of God. Therefore by faith I know it's inerrant and that means that God can't contradict Himself. That means the simpler will explain the more difficult. So you engage in that when you're handling a tough text as you own what is there in your life.

Those principled practices will lead to five practical practices. They examined the Scriptures daily so the first one is to establish a daily time in the Word. I suggest the morning mainly because I have found it very helpful to get the day started this way but that doesn't mean it's a sin to do it in the evening or another time. You establish the best time possible to meet God in His Word every day.

Secondly, establish a yearly or quarterly plan for your quiet time with the Lord. This is just practical advice. Maybe you want to read through the Bible in a year then establish a yearly plan. Maybe you want to study the book of Romans or another book of the Bible. In other words, create a plan and either do a yearly or a quarterly plan. I highly commend a good asset to you which is TableTalk. It is trustworthy theologically and it's well laid out. It leaves the Saturdays open for you to be able to use your personal time in preparation for worship on the Lord's Day.

There are two more things I'd like to recommend to you. There is a Monday through Friday ten minute podcast that you can find at harryreeder.crossapps.org or you can go to the Briarwood website to find it at www.briarwood.org. There is also Today in Perspective that looks at one or two events through a Christian lens with a Gospel solution every day and you can also find that on the Briarwood website. At the harryreeder.crossapps.org you can also find on the menu something called Fresh Bread and every day you get a slice of a five minute devotional that I do with one takeaway. Any of these can also help you get started in your daily time with the Lord.

Thirdly, integrate prayer before, during and after your time with the Lord. Start by praying 'God, open my eyes and my heart' then while you are doing that meditating and reflecting stop and pray 'God help me right here.' Then afterwards pray 'God, please build this into my life.' Also include your prayer requests in this time with the Lord.

Fourthly, set aside time for memorization, meditation and reflection. Intervarsity taught people to have a quiet time with the Lord. I use the phrase 'time alone with God' because my quiet time isn't too quiet. I'm reading out loud. I'm talking out loud. When I start praying silently when I'm by myself my mind only stays focused for about 28 seconds and then I start thinking of all these other things I need to do that day or what others need to do that day. When I

talk and read out loud it really helps me so my quiet times aren't all that quiet. So this time of meditation, memorization and reflection doesn't have to be quiet. It can be very verbal.

Fifthly, establish one life takeaway per session. Maybe consider using a journal where you write things down – your prayers, your thoughts, the Word you read, what you're learning. Write down your life takeaway. Then secure an opportunity and an accountability to share the fruit of your devotional with someone that day. Share what you learned with someone that day. In my accountability group almost always the first thing that is asked is 'how is your time with the Lord going? What are you doing in your time with the Lord?' Get someone you'll be accountable to for this. Then beat them to the punch before they ask how it is going say 'I want to tell you what I learned today.' When we are sharing with each other what are we doing? We are encouraging one another. Now you are becoming an asset in their life because of what God is teaching you in His Word. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You so much for the time we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for the privilege that we have to have this Word, to hear it preached, to sing it, to read it, to confess it and to spend time with You in it so that as we speak to You in prayer You speak to us through Your Word to our hearts. So Father, I pray for Your people that they might enjoy that daily time with You, help them get started. Thank You for that wonderful pamphlet titled '7 minutes with God' that someone put in my hands and how that has been able to build in my life. Help them to start with that 5 to 7 minutes and just keep growing and growing, feeding in the green pasture every morning and I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.