

STUDYING THE BIBLE TO KNOW JESUS

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Searcy, Arkansas
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Scripture Reading

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” (1 Jn 1:7 ESV)

INTRODUCTION

“This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:5-9)

The average Bible consumer has 9 Bibles and is looking for more. And most people start Bible reading plans and end in Leviticus. I’ve tried to think through why that is so.

Who am I talking about?

- He was born without shelter, laid in a shelter surrounded by straw, but was held in the hands of royalty.
- The man in charge had ordered the mass killing of every Hebrew baby under the age of 2. But he survived.
- Even as a baby we find him in Egypt, but he comes out of there to redeem his people.
- Although heir to royalty, this Hebrew Levite gave up his royal pedigree in order to take upon himself the form of a servant. He passes through water, then spends time in the desert wilderness, facing hardship, before climbing up a mountain and declaring the message of God.

I’m talking about Moses...and Jesus.

Who am I talking about? – Samuel and Jesus

Who am I talking about? – King David and Jesus (2 Samuel 15)

That is because Scripture—all of Scripture—points to Christ and has its fulfillment in Christ. “Everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” said Jesus; and so “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning **himself**” (Luke 24:44, 47).

How?¹

Some predict the Messiah: Isaiah 9

Some prepare us to appreciate what God provides and our need: character of God; law was our schoolmaster “to bring us to Christ” (Gal 3:24).

Some show us the result of Jesus’ work (“therefore” at the end of each Pauline book); compare Deut 5:6)

All Scripture read through a gospel lens means Scripture is RE-appropriated as a way to see Jesus, and thus to encounter God.

2 Timothy 3-4. Preach “the word” (same phrase used in 1 Cor 15: ‘the word/message’ that saves).

Romans 10: Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the message about Christ.

This helps us understand John 5:37-40: you search the Scriptures, because you think eternal life is found in them. But they all point to ME. You have to come to ME to find life.

Scriptures don’t testify about scripture. Bible isn’t written to tell me more about the Bible. Scriptures point to Christ. It’s all about HIM.

What do I do with that?

First, I change what I think the Bible is for. What is the purpose of Bible reading? It is good to know why you are doing this. [Story: BOAT] Draw a large box. “The goal of Bible reading.” What would you put in the box?

¹ Bryan Chapell, “4 Ways Your Whole Bible Points To Jesus.” <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/4-ways-bible-points-jesus/>

- *Learning all the right answers
- * defeating my neighbors
- * gaining points with God
- * winning trivial pursuit

Change it to “transformation into the character of Jesus.”

Just look at those passages we normally think are about “the Bible.” Every one of them is set in a character context. 2 Timothy 3:12 speaks of “all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus.” And verse 17 says the goal is to make a man or woman “complete, equipped for every good work.”

1 Peter 1:1-12 & 24-25 (Spirit-directed words, stands forever). But between them (vv13-25) is a section on holiness. His Spirit transforms his people.

2 Peter 1 ends with spirit-directed words. But begins by saying God gave us everything we need to live a Godly life.

Psalms 119:105—God’s word is what? A lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.

Character...not information.

I would have written “to gain knowledge.” Can we agree that knowledge is a wonderful thing? That God wants us to have knowledge? But when Paul describes a truly spiritual person, he speaks of the fruit the spirit gives...and knowledge doesn’t even make the list! Because knowledge “puffs up”, says Paul; but love “builds up” (Rom 12:2).

So, first I change what I think the Bible is for.

Second, I change what I come to the Bible to find. Have you ever tried to use the Bible as an encyclopedia to answer all your questions. We end up having to rewrite it. Change the order. Tell our friends a whole series of page turnings to uncover the secret code. Change the word we use to find the right one in the index. If its written to give a formula that will solve a pressing need, we will leave sadly forlorned.

But what if the Bible wasn’t written to answer all of our questions as much as it was written to question us? We go to the Bible with our questions, gripes, concerns, and doubts, and instead of answering them, we come face to face with Jesus who changes the game. God says “Let me tell MY story the way I want to tell it. And watch it change you.” It’s a consumer mindset that assumed the Bible exists to serve our needs. Like it’s an owners manual for successful living. But instead it invites us into a relationship, into a story.

I change what I expect to find. Not answers to my questions, but more and more about God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

So here are the questions to ask when you sit down to read or to study the Bible:

Am I more loving as a result of my reading? Am I more joyful? Do I have more peace? Am I more in love with God than ever before? Do I see the love, joy, and peace of God in the way this story worked out? If not, have I learned what to avoid so that I may have the love, joy, and peace of God? What do I learn about God? How is this reflected in Jesus? THESE are the primary questions we should ask when we read a text. Do I know Jesus Better? Am I more like God as a result?

SOME SUGGESTED READING STRATEGIES:

Read as Intended. Read a whole book all the way through. What is the writer getting at?

Read repetitiously. One person 3 times. First out loud. Second, silently, highlighting key passages that sum up the point. Then read just the highlighted lines and spend the day trying to commit one or two to memory.

Read humbly. Are my pre-conceived notions getting in the way? Friend doesn't write—to prejudice a second reading. I disagree; but get the point. Can I turn off every other faucet?

Read honestly. Question marks? What does that mean, exactly? Song “Lord of Sabaoth.” I bet 99 percent of us just say “Lord of Sabbath” and assume it's a typo. But its not. Lord of Sabaoth is “Lord of hosts.” I just want to know and understand. “It can't mean that because I already know from other verses that...” and we don't wrestle with it. Is my heart ready to receive this?

Read prayerfully. Have you thought of bible reading as a worship practice? Talking with God the whole time.

Read in community. What do you see in this? Commentaries are that. But not all. Find people very much unlike you. Why do you see it that way?