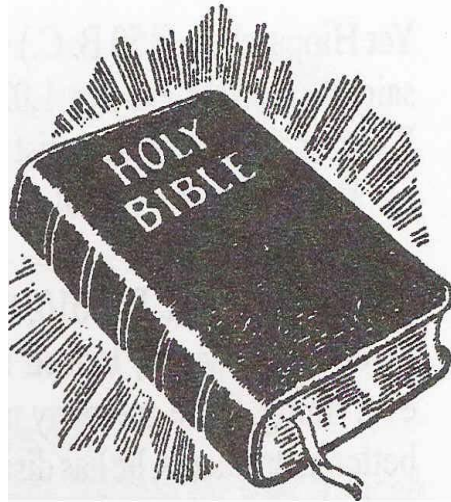


DISCIPLESHIP LESSON No 1

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE



During my ministry over the last thirty five years or so I have been asked the question many times over, "How can I get to know and understand the Bible?"

Even Christians who have been saved for some time have expressed difficulty in fully appreciating and grasping the scriptures, so if you find yourself having the same problem, let me help you by sharing with you how to go about it!

First of all there are some things you really need to comprehend and get a hold of regarding the Bible

□ The Word of God as revealed in the Bible **is a Living, powerful thing**. The very life of God is imparted through the word of God. The Bible is much more than just a history book, or a book of stories and biographies of men and women down through the ages. **It is the Word of God. God speaking to man, speaking to you**, revealing Himself, showing his will, his purpose and plan for life, from creation to the ultimate fulfillment and consummation of His kingdom at Christ's second coming. Men inspired by the Holy Spirit wrote as **God directed them** (2Timothy 3:16 and 2Peter1:20-21). It is through God's Word that He makes everything He is and has available to us (2Peter 1:3-4)

□ Jesus said "The words which I speak unto you they are spirit and they are life" (John 6:63). This truth is illustrated in the bible through the analogy of "**seed**" (The parable of the seed and the sower Mark 4: 1-20). A seed held in the palm of your hand may seem lifeless and dead, but give it the right conditions of soil, sunshine and water and the seed will spring into life and produce fruit of its own kind. In the same way to some the word of God may appear to be lifeless and dead, but give it the right conditions of the ground of a receptive heart, faith and illumination by the Holy Spirit and it will spring into life and produce the fruit of the nature of God. The word of God is so filled with supernatural power that when it is received in faith and acted upon, it will fulfill itself and bring into being that which it says and promises!

□ It is essential to accept the above mentioned facts about the Bible, **the living powerful Word of God**, if you want to understand it and be blessed by it. So the very next time you read it, which I trust is soon, give it the respect and honour which it deserves, open your heart to God and be expectant of receiving life and blessing from it, and it will begin to change your life in a way you never dreamed possible!



Secondly you need to appreciate that there are several different ways in which we can approach and use the Word of God:

☐ **You can just read it**, as much and as often as you can, at least once every day, for after all it is our spiritual food. Just as our physical bodies need food to keep them alive and well, so the spiritual part of our beings needs to be fed, and the Word of God is our spiritual food (Mathew 4:4 and 1Peter2:2) When you read a news paper, magazine or book you are in fact feeding your mind. What you read will stimulate your mind in a way which will impact your life, by knowledge gained, influence and perspective imparted. In a much more profound way the Word of God will not only stimulate your mind but it will impact your spirit by cleansing it as you receive it (John 15:3 and 17:17). It will influence your life by renewing your mind so that you can begin to think like God thinks (Romans 12:2 and Ephesians 4:22-24), and when you start to think like God thinks, knowing his perfect will and purpose for your life, you will start to act like God acts. It will bring change to your speech, your actions your motives and the way in which you conduct yourself. More than that it will bring peace and comfort, direction and blessing in times when you need it most. My advice to you is to get a modern translation of the bible, one that is easy to read and understand and make a practice of reading it consistently and regularly. Read the account of creation, the fall of man and the flood. Read about Abraham and the way God chose him to be the father of a special people to be his own. Read about the Patriarchs of old and the hero's of the bible, the dealings of God with his people. Read the new testament Gospels about the life and ministry of Jesus, His sacrificial death on the cross and His glorious resurrection. Read the book of acts about the early Church and its impact on the world, read the Epistles which give revelation, doctrine and correction for the Church and its members and then read the book of revelation and the incredible prophecies which are being fulfilled before our very eyes as we approach the end of the age and the coming of Christ...Yes read, read and read some more. The more you read the more you will love it and be blessed by it!

☐ **You can think and meditate on it.** Take a short passage of scripture such as Psalm 1 and after reading it a couple of times, pray and ask God to speak to you through it and then just think about what you have read, meditate and reflect on it.....is it relevant to your need and situation?.....what could God be saying to you through it?.....is there something you need to do about it, applying it to your life?.....does it contain a promise from God that you need to accept, believe and receive?.are there conditions that you need to meet? You see once you start getting really serious about the Word of God, the Holy Spirit will begin to illuminate your heart and mind, faith will come (Romans 10:17) and transformation of your life will take place! Endeavour to find passages of scripture that are relevant to where you are and what your need is, but also be open to all scripture and let God speak to you through it.

For meditation purposes the Psalms and Proverbs are a good place to start.

☐ **You can pray it.** Use the bible as a prayer book. We need to understand that God is not moved by the length of our prayers, or by the repetition of our prayers. He is not moved by our eloquence or ability to express ourselves, but he is moved by our absolute sincerity and the earnestness with which we pray. He is also moved by our motive in prayer when we sincerely desire to know and do his will and trust him with every aspect of our lives. Consider carefully 1John 5:14-15. If we ask or pray according to his will we know that he hears us, and if we know that he hears us when we pray then we know that we have our prayers answered. Many times we do not know the will of God or are not sure of the will of God and in fact many times we just don't know what to pray. What better way of praying Gods will than praying his word Lets be honest, we sometimes get bored by our own prayers because we just repeat the same things day after day. If we get bored with our prayers, they are hardly likely to have much impression on God. But when you start to pray his word in sincerity you immediately have his attention. God always honours his word.



Now I want to be practical and so let me demonstrate this for you, lest using the bible as a prayer book becomes just another form of vain repetition.

So let's pray the first few verses of Psalm 103.....

Verse 1..... Read it "Bless the Lord oh my soul and all that is within me, bless his holy name"

Now pray it. Lord I just want to bless you right now, from the depths of my heart I want to praise and magnify and glorify your name. I want to tell you how much I love you and appreciate you, how much you mean to me and how much I long to please you in everything I do. Please accept my praise and adoration!

Verse 2..... Read it "Forget not all his benefits"

Now pray it. Lord as I think about it I realize just how much you have done for me in the past, how good you have been to me all my lifeStart to recall these things and start to thank God for each one of them.....Then tell God how grateful you are and how much you appreciate his love and kindness.

Verse 3.....Read it "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities: who healeth all thy diseases, who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies"

Now pray it Thank you so much Lord that when I confess my sins to you, you not only forgive me but remove every record of it so that it is forgotten by you, never to be remembered again. Lord I am so glad that I do not have to listen to the voice of the devil who accuses me, I do not have to live under a cloud of condemnation. I am free because your blood covers all my sin and makes me righteous and as white as snow.

Thank you Lord that you are my heavenly doctor (Exodus 15:26) and that through what Jesus did on the cross I can receive healing from all my sickness. Your word says that "By his stripes I was healed" (1 Peter 2:24).....I receive that healing by faith right now. I expect healing to take place as I continue to thank and praise you for what you are doing in my body.

And Lord I want to thank you that you are such a loving, merciful and gracious God. I really don't deserve such wonderful loving care but Oh Lord I am so grateful to know that nothing will ever separate me from your love, nothing can stop you from loving me, and I just want to say I love you too!

NOTE: As you start to pray the word of God like this, not only will your prayer times become fresh, meaningful and enjoyable, you will find that instead of struggling to pray for just a short time, you will be amazed at how time flies and how much time you have spent talking with God through his word!

You will also discover that it is important to find scripture to pray that is relevant, that is conducive to praise and worship, that is instructive to Christian living and reveals the promises and blessings of God.

The Psalms are excellent for praise and worship and many other facets of the Christian life and so they are a good place to start. Proverbs is full of instruction and Godly wisdom if you are needing that. The Gospels will help you identify with Jesus, his nature, life and his ministry. They will inspire you as in prayer you put yourself into the scene or story and let Jesus be speaking and ministering to you. Remember Jesus is eternal, he has not changed, the life and power of his word has not changed, and although he now sits at the right hand of his Father in heaven he is your faithful high Priest, intercessor, mediator and friend and he will minister to you by his Spirit through his word. The Epistles are full of powerful teaching and instruction that will strengthen your faith, show you how to overcome the devil and temptation, equip you for serving God and be a blessing to others.

It is important not to be lazy. As you read the scriptures which was our first point in how to approach the word of God you will discover for yourself the relevant scripture passages that you need to pray through. Make a note of them for future reference and prayer.



□ **You can Study it.** 2Timothy 2:15 says we should study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing or discerning the word of God. The big question is how do I go about studying it? Let me share something with you that I have found extremely helpful, but in order to do so I need to illustrate the **'principle to you'**

Suposing you wanted to be an aircraft designer, how would you go about it? Just drawing fancy aeroplanes, no matter how good they may look would be useless for the simple reason they would never fly. Before you ever started to design or draw an aircraft you would have to study the **'Principles of Aerodynamics'** and having fully understood them you could then proceed to design the aircraft accordingly so that the finished product once built would fly in other words it is the **'Principles'** involved that are the all important factor!

Now in the same way if you want your life to be a success and be the man or the woman God wants you to be and has designed you to be, you need to study and understand the **'Principles'** that he has laid out in the word of God for you in order to accomplish just that.

I have found that the best way to study the bible is to find the **'Principles that are revealed'** and once you have grasped those, the Bible will come alive for you and you will see just how everything fits together and falls into perspective, and you will be able to apply them to your life with wonderful effect!

Now read the following passage of scripture carefully.....Hebrews 5:8 through 6:2 Paul who is presumed to be the writer of the book of Hebrews is chiding those to whom he writes for their careless approach and lack of application to 'Hear' or study and understand the **'FIRST PRINCIPLES OF THE ORACLES OF GOD'** They should have been in a position to teach others the principles but needed to be taught themselves over and over again. Because of their lack of application and comprehension they were like Juveniles, unskillful in discerning God's word, unable to make progress, understanding the deeper things of God and develop towards 'perfection' which means spiritual maturity. Then in chapter 6:1 Paul lays out the basic or foundation "Principles of the doctrines of Christ. They are as follows:

- **Repentance from Dead Works**
- **Faith towards God**
- **Baptism's (note plural)**
- **Laying on of hands**
- **Resurrection of the dead**
- **Eternal Judgement**

Now in the next few Lessons we are going to study these basic doctrinal principles because until we have laid this foundation we cannot proceed with true Discipleship. Discipleship is not just gaining **information or revelation** it is the application of the Word of God which brings about **life transformation**. Once we have established the foundation principles we are going to discover all the other principles of God's Word and start to apply them to our lives.



DISCIPLESHIP LESSON No 2

Repentance from dead works and Faith towards God

Genuine Life transformation cannot even begin to take place until the first two principles of the Doctrine of Christ are properly understood and applied. Repentance from dead works and faith towards God are absolutely essential!

1. What is meant by Repentance

Most people understand repentance to mean being sorry for what has been done, however the repentance required by the Word of God is something far greater than that. You see, being sorry for what you have done may just be an emotional response, especially if you are caught out and are liable for punishment.

The emotion of sorrow on its own does not result in any change of heart or life transformation.

This fact is illustrated by the life of Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus. When he realised the enormity of what he had done and the judgement that it was going to bring upon his soul, he was very sorry that he had done it, but his sorrow was not repentance, it was just remorse because of the consequences and trouble that he was in. His sorrow had nothing to do with recognising his awful lust for money and the lengths he was prepared to go to in order to get it. There was no desire in his heart to change his lifestyle and be different. We know this because he was given the opportunity for genuine repentance. At the last supper when Jesus was together with his disciples he exposed what was in the heart of Judas, but instead of acknowledging his sinful intention and asking for forgiveness he purposefully went out and did it. The end result was that far from any life transformation his sorrow only led to committing suicide and being eternally damned!

Genuine repentance is the kind of sorrow that results in

- A change of heart
- A change of direction, an about turn.
- A commitment to do something about it and be different.

The prodigal son (Luke 15) experienced genuine repentance when he determined to get up and go back to his father, confessing his wayward and rebellious life style and behaviour, and being prepared to change his ways and submit himself to the authority and care of his dad.

Now the sorrow he experienced resulted in not only a change of heart and attitude, but a change of conduct and a new life style. The prodigal experienced life transformation.

The contrast between these two kinds of sorrow can be seen in 2Corinthians 7:10

The sorrow of the world which leads to death and

Godly sorrow which leads to repentance and salvation

