

The Word, Part 1 - Spiritual Practices

Introduction - Why it Matters

We are in the middle of a three week series on the Spiritual Disciplines of Prayer, Word, and Fasting with a heart attack in-between.

In a way, I'd like to pick up where I left off last week.

Matthew 28:20 -- "Behold, I am with you always to the end of the age."

What I shared with you last week was essentially a testimony of how God used this one piece of a Bible verse to carry me through a very difficult time when my Boogeyman came knocking.

In that frightening moment, it wasn't the words of friends, mentors, parents, my wife, good preachers, or anyone else that carried me. It was the words of God stored away in my heart and mind. Because when your Boogeyman comes calling, other people's words aren't enough to sustain you. Only the very words of God will do!

The thing is, had I NOT read that verse before this happened then those words would not have been there to call upon.

That makes this topic serious business, because I know that many of us here (maybe most of us) are seriously Biblically illiterate and it's killing your faith and it makes you impotent when you face the trouble in your life. You always feel untethered in your life, and it's because you are.

Maturity = Bible

It's been said, and I agree, "I've never met a strong Christian that doesn't consistently meditate on the Word of God, and I've never met a weak Christian who does."

You will not grow in your faith to a place of stable maturity and trust in God without personally meditating on the Word of God regularly. Don't fool yourself. It won't happen. It is a non-negotiable part of following Jesus.

About the Bible

The Bible is the most popular Book ever sold, yet most people know very little about it and often start off on the wrong foot in their Bible study. After one frustrating attempt, they put it away and never try it again.

What the Bible is NOT:

- It is not God's Handbook for Life. It doesn't work that way. It's not a magic 8 Ball that you shake and ask a question.

- It is also not a Roadmap for Life telling you what to do at every turn. Try asking it whether or not you should take that new job and see what it says.
- It's not a magical talisman that you carry with you to ward off evil spirits, guarantee God's blessing, or make your home prosper.
- It is not a symbol of Christianity that you can simply display in your home, office, car, or whatever to "be a witness" thereby absolving you of any need to actually read it or actually live like a Christian
- It is not a history book, though it does contain history.
- It is not a Science book, though it does contain science.
- It is not always clear, but it is always true.

What the Bible IS:

- It is God's very words through the agency of human authors
- It's central figure is Jesus. The OT points ahead to Him, the New Testament introduces us to Him and then records the effects of His coming. Just like the Christian life, it's all about Jesus.
- It is our highest authority for all matters of life and truth
- It is our only reliable measurement of reality
- It is just as true now as it ever was, and it is just as relevant now as it ever was.
- It is living and active - when you read it, it breathes Life into your spirit whether you feel it or not
- In so far as your translation is accurate to the original writing, it is infallible
- With the Holy Spirit's help, it is understandable and profitable to all - whether young or old in the Lord
- A collection of books that only be accessed through the reading words. So, you're going to have to read.

Some Important Facts:

- The Bible is not one book. It is a collection of 66 books. Think of it as a library, not as a book. (calling it "The Good Book" has misled people for a long time)
- Because it is a collection, reading it back to front doesn't work well at all.
- 66 total books divided across Old and New Testaments (testament used to mean "covenant" or "document of proof") When we refer to the OT and NT, we mean covenant.
- 39 books on the OT. 27 in the NT.
- It is divided up into 6 genres of ancient literature: Law, History, Wisdom & Poetry, Prophecy, Gospels, Letters (Epistles)
- The Bible was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by over 40 different authors from all walks of life: shepherds, farmers, tent-makers, physicians, fishermen, priests, philosophers and kings. Despite these differences in occupation and the span of years it took to write it, the Bible is an extremely cohesive and unified book.
- It was written over a period of about 1,500 years, from around 1450 B.C. (the time of Moses) to about 100 A.D. (following the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ).
- The Bible was written in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Koine Greek. What you have is a DIRECT translation from the manuscripts (original language copies) originally written in those languages. Your translation is NOT a translation of a translation of a translation.
- The entire New Testament as we know it today, was canonized before the year 375 A.D. The Old Testament had previously been canonized long before the advent of Christ.
- How the canon was formed, which books were in or out, is a big topic. Basically, there were a set of measurements and rules that a book had to meet including that the greater Body of Christ at the time had to collectively receive it as God's word to them before it could be included.

- It's important, however, to acknowledge that no human being has the authority to grant authority to scripture. All we can do is recognize it as the word of God, not *make* it the word of God.

Is My Bible Reliable to the Original Writings?

This is the most common question or accusation against the Bible and it is easy to answer.

First, the Bible is not a translation of a translation of a translation and so on. It is a translation of original copies.

Meaning, modern Bibles are translated from original languages.

These manuscripts were painstakingly copied by hand from original language manuscripts.

The New Testament

We can verify the accuracy of the copies by comparing them with other copies. The closer in time the copy is to the original writing, the more it is trusted. So the date of the copy is important, as well as how many copies there are to compare. The more copies, and the earlier the date, the more scholars trust the accuracy of a text to its original writing.

AUTHOR	EARLIEST COPY	# OF COPIES
Homer	???	643
Plato	1,300 years	7
Aristotle	1,400 years	5
Caesar	950 years	10
Tacitus	1,000 years	20
NEW TESTAMENT	100 YEARS	About 14,000

Statistically, the New Testament is 99.5% textually pure. That means that there is only 1/2 of 1% of all the copies that do not agree with each other perfectly. But, if you take that 1/2 of 1% and examine it, you find that the majority of the 'problems' are nothing more than spelling errors and very minor word alterations. For example, instead of saying Jesus, a variation might be 'Jesus Christ.'

The Old Testament

Scribes known as Masoretes had very strict rules about making copies to keep the text from being changed even down to the letter.

When an obvious error was found (even penmanship mistakes and typos) the corrected was written in the margin, not on the original text.

When a word was considered textually, grammatically, or exegetically questionable, dots were placed above that word instead of changing the text. (Like in Genesis when Esau ran out to hug Jacob, they thought this out of character for Esau and dotted it, but did not change it.)

Minute statistics were kept as a safeguard against errors:

- in the Hebrew Bible at Leviticus 8:8, the margin has a reference that this verse is the middle verse of the Torah.
- According to the note at Lev. 10:16 the word *darash* is the middle word in the Torah,
- and at 11:42 there is a notation that the *waw* in a Hebrew word there is the middle letter.
- At the end of each book are statistics like: the total number of verses in Deuteronomy is 955, the total in the entire Torah is 5,845; the total number of words is 97,856, and the total number of letters is 400,945. (someone counted to make sure the copy and the original matched up!)

Until the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947, we didn't have any copies of the OT before AD 895, simply because the Jews so revered these writings that when they got worn out they would bury them to keep them out of the wrong hands.

The Dead Sea Scrolls are Hebrew texts of the OT (except Esther) that date back to 1st and 2nd century B.C.! And the Masorete's copies have proven to be extremely accurate and trustworthy.

There are also some other early OT texts that date back to the 3rd century BC that provide us with some comparisons.

What About Translations?

How We Get From the Original to Your Bible

Inspiration (divine author) – God breathes His word through human authors using their personalities, gifts, and experiences as tools to communicate His Word.

The Original Text – written thousands of years ago

Copies of the original text – we want to get back as close as we can to the original text to ensure the most accurate picture of the original, inspired, text.

Critical Text – put together all the text fragments which will give you the best picture of the original.

Translator or translation team brings that critical text into the modern culture and language. The safest translations will be done by a team, not an individual made up of various experts in different Biblical genres, books, or other Biblical specialties.

Translation Continuum

FORMAL (word for word/literal) <-----> **FUNCTIONAL** (thought for thought)

NIV is in the middle, ESV is about halfway from there to the left. The Message is on the far right.

What the Bible Says about Itself

Circular reasoning is unavoidable when you are talking about ultimate things. If Scripture is our highest authority, to what authority should Scripture appeal to in order to be verified? If there was such an authority, wouldn't THAT authority have the same problem?

- **2 Peter 3:15-16**
- **2 Timothy 3:16-17**
- Proverbs 30:6
- **Isaiah 55:11**
- **Psalms 19:7**
- Psalms 119:105
- John 17:17
- James 1:22
- **Hebrews 4:12**
- Acts 17:10-11
- **I Corinthians 14:37**
- Ephesians 3:4-5

Conclusion

Read your Bible this week. Set a goal that you can achieve. If that's reading it one time, do it. If that's listening to it in the car. Do it.

Set a goal right now. Make it specific. WHEN? WHERE?

Spend this week praying and asking God to help you desire HIM in a way that causes you to desire to read HIS WORD.