

MEETING WITH CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE

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Introductory Comments -

The Basic Point: We **NEED** God's Word.

*“The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the Lord swore to give to your fathers. And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but **man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.**” (Deuteronomy 8:1-3)*

God's Word is powerful in our lives. God intended it to be so. It's designed to get stuff done. It's a very *active* thing!

I. The Tendency Toward Misappropriation

II. Four Convictions Necessary for a Functional Doctrine of Scripture
(i.e., things you need to really believe about the Bible)

A. The “God-breathedness” of Scripture –

B. The “Understandableness” of Scripture –

C. The Usefulness of Scripture –

D. The Efficacy of Scripture -

Consider all the things Scripture claims it can do:

- initiates faith – Romans 10:17
 - gives new spiritual life – I Peter 1:23; James 1:18
 - helps us grow – I Peter 2:2; I Thess. 2:13; Acts 20:32
 - sanctifies – John 17:17; Eph. 5:26
 - searches and convicts – Heb. 4:12
 - liberates – John 8:31-32
 - refreshes and renews (and all sorts of other things) – Psalm 119
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- A closer look at a Scriptural gem - Psalm 19:7-11

Simply put, it is God's intention (i.e., both his design and his desire) to nurture us by his Word. In fact, Scripture is the primary means by which God effects our sanctification. Our responsibility is to create opportunities for the Word to exercise this intended effect.

III. The Appropriate Posture Toward Scripture - Humility

“Take every word as spoken to yourselves. When the word thunders against sin, think thus: ‘God means my sins;’ when it presseth any duty, ‘God intends me in this.’ Many put off Scripture from themselves, as if it only concerned those who lived in the time when it was written; but if you intend to profit by the word, bring it home to yourselves: a medicine will do no good, unless it be applied.” (From a sermon by Thomas Watson entitled “How We May Read the Scriptures with Most Spiritual Profit”)

IV. A Strongly Urged Method - Ten Recommendations for the Practice of Prayerful Meditation on Scripture

“Meditating is thinking about, reflecting upon, considering, taking to heart, reading slowly and carefully, prayerfully taking in, and humbly receiving into mind, heart and will that which God has revealed. Meditation is being guided by the indwelling spirit of Christ in the consideration of God’s revelation.” Peter Toon in *Meditating as a Christian*

“My chief help [in reading Scripture] is prayer. Whenever I study a single part of divine truth, I always gain some light about it after praying and meditating...But no one should expect to see much good resulting from his labors if he does not spend time in prayer and meditation.” George Muller in his autobiography

1. Set aside sufficient time so that you can be **unhurried** in your reading.

The difference between formative and informative reading –

2. Seek for consistency in daily time and place.

3. Be somewhat systematic. Have some plan but make sure your plan is serving God's intention not tyrannizing it.

Some godly counsel from John Wesley -

"If you desire to read the Scriptures in such a manner as may most effectually answer this end, would it not be advisable, (1) To set apart a little time, if you can, every morning and evening for that purpose? (2) At each time, if you have leisure, to read a chapter out of the Old and one out of the New Testament; if you cannot do this, to take a single chapter, or a part of one? (3) To read this with a single eye, to know the will of God, and a fixed resolution to do it? In order to know his will, you should, (4) Have a constant eye to the analogy of faith, the connexion and harmony there is between those grand, fundamental doctrines, original sin, justification by faith, the new birth, inward and outward holiness: (5) Serious and earnest prayer should be constantly used before we consult the oracles of God; seeing 'Scripture can only be understood through the same Spirit whereby it was given..' Our reading should likewise be closed with prayer, that what we read may be written on our hearts: (6) It might also be of use, if, while we read we were frequently to pause, and examine ourselves by what we read, both with regard to our hearts and lives. And whatever light you then receive should be used to the uttermost, and that immediately. Let there be no delay. Whatever you resolve begin to execute the first moment you can. So shall you find this word to be indeed the power of God unto present and eternal salvation."

4. Position yourself for the benefit of “cross-fertilization.”
5. “Adopt practical ways to impede mental drift.” (cf . D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, pp.20-22)

6. Allow God's Word to lead you into prayer.

“Turn the Bible into prayer. Thus, if you were reading the First Psalm, spread the Bible on the chair before you, and kneel and pray, ‘O Lord, give me the blessedness of this man’; ‘let me not stand in the counsel of the ungodly.’ This is the best way of knowing the meaning of the Bible and of learning to pray.”
(Robert Murray M'Cheyne)

“Prayer may turn reading into seeing.” (J. Piper)

7. Allow God's Word to guide you in prayer (cf. Carson, pp. 32-33). It may help to cultivate some “Scripture paths”—a few favorite places you regularly go.

e.g. – Jer. 17:10 > Ps. 139:23-24 > Heb. 4:12

Ps. 5:3 > Phil. 4:6-7

Ps. 13:5-6 > Rom. 5:8 > Rom. 8:32

8. Memorize Scripture! This both is meditation and fosters future meditation.
9. Read books that stir your affections for God's Word and thereby stir your will to read God's Word.
10. After a particular week has passed, look back and recount what took place with reference to the practice of this discipline. Assess what actually happened and make adjustments where necessary.

V. How? – A Simple Recommendation for Daily Time in God’s Word

Step One – Briefly pray for God’s help as you read His Word. Humbly acknowledge your need for this help. **Ask God to feed you with His Word.** This small act of humility will position you for God’s grace. Remember, *“God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble.”*

Some sample prayers:

- God, as I read your Word, would you please make yourself known to me. Amen.
- God, as I come to your Word, would you please form your mind and your heart in me. I want to think about things the way you think about things. I want to feel about things the way you feel about things. And I want to respond to things the way you would have me respond to things. So God, I ask for your help now through your Word. Amen.
- God, as I read your Word, please “open my eyes, that I may see wonderful things out of your law.” (Ps. 119:18)
- God, my heart is not inclined to your Word this morning. Oh, God please “incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain.” (Ps. 119:36)
- “Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.” (Ps. 25:4-5)
- God, “please show me now your ways, that I may know you.” (Ex. 33:13)
- “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me, and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” (Ps. 139:23-24)
- Oh Father, would you out of the riches of your glory strengthen me with power by your Spirit in my inner man so that, as I read your Word, Christ might dwell in my heart by faith and I might be rooted and grounded in his love, and, in fact, know His love for me today. (cf. Eph. 3:16-19)
- Oh God, “satisfy me again this morning with your steadfast love, that I may rejoice and be glad all day long.” (Ps. 90:14)

Step Two – In an unhurried way, read through a pre-selected portion of Scripture. What you are seeking for is **prayerful meditation** on God’s Word. You are seeking to let God feed you with His Word.

Three Key Ingredients to Prayerful Meditation:

➤ Some Time –

➤ A Plan –

➤ A Method –

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“Turn the Bible into prayer. Thus, if you were reading the First Psalm, spread the Bible on the chair before you, and kneel and pray, ‘O Lord, give me the blessedness of this man’; ‘let me not stand in the counsel of the ungodly.’ This is the best way of knowing the meaning of the Bible and of learning to pray.” (Robert Murray M’Cheyne)

Step Three – Let your meditation on Scripture lead you into a time of more intercessory prayer according to your own life situation, needs and responsibilities.