



Means of God's Grace: The Word of God

The Gideons International, founded here in Janesville, distributes one million Bibles every week worldwide and at the front of each copy reads the following text:

The Bible contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its stories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, and practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you.

It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's charter. Here Paradise is restored, Heaven opened, and the gates of hell disclosed.

Christ is its grand subject, our good the design, and the glory of God its end.

It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, and prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure. It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labor, and will condemn all who trifle with its sacred contents.

In Jesus' high priestly prayer on the night of his betrayal, Jesus said, "*Sanctify them by the truth; your Word is truth.*" The Bible is a gift beyond measure and understanding it is absolutely essential to living the Christian life. In the passages listed below, underline what God commands us to do with His Word:

"Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you--they are your life" (Dt 32:46-47).

"Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful" (Jos 1:8).

"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Ps 119:11).

"Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law" (Pr 19:18).

"Now the Bereans were of more noble character...for they...examined the Scriptures every day" (Acts 17:11).

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom" (Col 3:16).

"Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near" (Rev 1:3).

Can you say that you own nothing more valuable than your Bible? All of life should be spent either reading the Bible or doing something in response to its message. So how do we let God's Word dwell in us richly?

There are four levels of Bible reading. All are important and each should be practiced in varying degrees depending on the season of your spiritual growth.

1. Bible Reading

Before you dig into the details, it's important to become familiar with the whole story, with the people, places, events and themes of the Bible. The goal of Bible reading isn't simply to gain information, but that is the starting point to knowing His Word, learning His ways and obeying His commands.

- use the *One Year Bible* or some other reading plan to guide your reading in a systematic way
- pick one major book from each section of the Bible and read it through
- read *The Everyday Guide to the Bible* or some other simple introduction to the Bible.

2. Bible Memorization

When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, he conquered Satan's subtle lies with the truths of God's Word that he had memorized. He didn't just know the basic idea, he quoted the Bible from memory. Having God's Word solidly in your head allows you to let it sink deep into your heart.

- review the four CrossTraining memory verses
- ask a Christian whom you respect what their favorite Bible verse is and memorize it.
- as you read the Bible and a verse jumps out at you, determine to memorize it.

3. Bible Meditation

David wrote, "*Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long*" (Ps 119:97). In order for Christ's words to dwell in you richly, you need to spend time meditating on the meaning of God's Word, pondering its purpose for your life, internalizing God's principles and promises, and applying His commands in your relationships, your actions, your thoughts and desires.

- begin a Bible study journal to write down your insights, questions and applications
- ask yourself, since this is true, what difference does it make?
- use passages of Scripture to guide your prayer time for yourself and for others

Bible Study Tools

Study Bible

Gives notes that explain the meaning, relevance and application of the biblical text and lists cross-references, which are other verses on a similar topic.

Bible Atlas

Has maps of the historical places and events recorded in the Bible.

Concordance

Lists every word used in the Bible and every verse where each word is used. Most also provide a Hebrew and Greek dictionary linking the original words to the English translation.

Bible Dictionary

Defines and further explains how a word is used or a topic is covered in the Bible. Bible Encyclopedias go into even greater detail.

Bible Commentary

Provides interpretation and application of the biblical text based on extensive Bible knowledge and scholarly research.

4. Bible Study

Paul told Timothy to “*do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth*” (2Tim 2:15). Bible study takes some serious work, but the rewards are worth the effort. The purpose of studying is to correctly understand the Bible’s teaching so you can correctly apply it and correctly teach it to others.

- review the OICA steps from CrossTraining 1
- use a concordance to study the meaning and use of a certain word in Scripture
- take a chapter of the Bible and outline it

The Goal of Bible Reading

The Bible is a means of God’s grace. That means that reading, memorizing, meditating and studying the Bible is the way we can lay hold of God’s grace which empowers us to become like Jesus. To be transformed into Jesus’ image in our relationship with God our Father and with our fellow man is the Christian life and that can only happen through the faithful use of God’s Word.

This means that we need to approach God’s Word with a **humble attitude**. God is right; we are not, our culture is not. We need to approach God’s Word with **faith**. God never lies; He tells the truth and He keeps His promises. We need to approach God’s Word with **surrender**. If we read it or hear it, but don’t do it, the Bible tells us we are self-deceived. God’s Word is meant to be believed, received and obeyed. Only then can God’s purposes be fulfilled in your life.

Week 6 Homework

✝ Practice your memory verse: **Ephesians 5:1-2**

✝ Read Schwarz, pp. 258-261

✝ Read **Psalm 19** and use one of the Bible reading levels for your study. What did you do and what did you gain by doing this?

✝ Take the **Purpose Driven Spiritual Health Assessment**. Where do you need the most work? What is one action step you are going to do in order to strengthen that aspect of your Christian life?