



INTRODUCTION

Precious as Gold: Practical as Tools

The miners of the California gold rush wouldn't have rushed if this precious metal was not also practical. People love gold not only because of its beauty and shine, but because it can be turned into money to buy houses, land, and lots of high-returning stocks and bonds.

In the same way, God's Word is as practical as it is precious. Thomas Watson underscored its value when he wrote, "Islands of spices, coasts of pearl, rocks of diamonds, these are but the riches that reprobates may have. But the Word gives us those riches which angels have."³ At the same time, this precious Book is of immense practical value to the believer. Both the first and the fortieth Presidents of the United States of America understood this. George Washington, said, "It is impossible to righteously govern the world without God and the Bible," and Ronald Reagan pronounced, "Within the covers of one single book, the Bible, are all the answers to all the problems that face us today—if only we would read and believe."

If God's Word is as practical as it is precious, it should influence every part of our lives. Loving God's Word does not mean simply "doing your devotions." Anyone can "do" devotions. Muslims bow toward Mecca, Jews supplicate at the praying wall, and Yoga students meditate on their "inner voice." The phrase "do your devotions" has been reduced to a remedial ritual to absolve guilt for not doing your daily ceremonies. We must not use God's Word like a nightly toothpaste to chase away the plaque of guilt. Knowing God's Word is about knowing a Person, the Almighty, awesome God of the universe who is too holy to be looked upon and so gracious that He did not spare His Son a torturous death so that we can have eternal life. The believer who views time in God's Word as just another appointment on his Outlook calendar has terribly abused the purpose of the Bible.

Men (if you are married), how would your wife feel if the only time you spoke to her was during your daily fifteen minute "marriage devotion time?"

³ Thomas Watson, *Heaven Taken By Storm* (Morgan: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1992), 13.

And if you refused to call her, think about her, pray for her, or touch her the rest of the day and night until the next "fifteen minute marriage devotion" time, what would happen to your marriage? It would fade out like an isolated burning coal.

Although scheduling daily time for Bible study is essential, the influence of the Word of God is not meant to be relegated to an item on a to do list, compartmentalized to one small section of the day. The purpose of Bible study time is to fill you with truth so that it can disseminate into your soul the rest of the day. Years ago, I helped my father and brother build a house on the west coast. Because the building was far from grocery stores, my brother and I would stock up on Ranchers candies every Sunday so that we could enjoy them throughout the week. We knew if we didn't stock up on Sunday, we would be candy-less all week long. Likewise you must stock up on the Word of God. In the middle of a hectic life with so many responsibilities pulling you every which way, you have to set aside protected time to be in the Word. If you don't plan in advance, time in the Word gets postponed, the end of the week arrives and you feel the pain of spiritual malnourishment when you realize that you haven't cracked your Bible all week long. Back on the coast, my brother and I would pop in a candy and suck on it for hours until it was nothing but a reduced sliver of sugar, food coloring, and high fructose corn syrup. No sooner would one disappear that we'd pop in another. In a similar way, God wants you to enjoy the savoring flavor of His Word all throughout the day. Spurgeon stated, "Take a text, and lay it on your tongue like a wafer made with honey, and let it melt in your mouth all the day. If you do this, and meditate upon it, you will be surprised to notice how the various events of life will help to open up that text."

As you finish your time in study and close the Bible to go on with your day, realize that your "devotion time" has not ended but just begun! How long would a mountain climber last if he spent an hour packing his gear but forgot to bring it on his expedition? The close of your study time begins hours of daily devotion as you mentally dip into those wonderful truths throughout the day and marinate your decision-making with divine truth!

I know of some believers who write a passage on a 3x5 card, stick it on their dashboard and see it every time they turn the key. I have another friend who was so harassed by off-colored jokes by his co-workers that he brought his Bible to work with him and read it every lunch break.

Go to work with the Word in your heart, praying to the God of the Word and obeying the commands of the Word. Let it help you in temptation, encourage you in dark places, and give you strength when you feel weak. Let it be so gratifying to your soul that all other temptations lose their flavor! Let it permeate your mind, run through your blood, protect your thoughts, and influence your decisions. The believer who holds the Word of God before his mind's eye all through the day

will find it hard to give sin a glance of attention.

Eleanor Schmidt relates in *Reader's Digest* how her doctor recommended surgery and referred her to a specialist. Arriving early for her appointment, she found the door unlocked and the young surgeon behind the desk deeply engrossed in reading, so she cleared her throat. Startled, he looked up and closed the book. Suddenly, she realized that this book was the Bible. "Does reading the Bible help you before or after an operation?" she asked. Her fears were dispelled by his soft, one-word answer: "During."

ANCIENT BUT RELEVANT

Within the pages of this book you will find seven strategies to nurture a deeper love for God's Word and it all starts with the heart of the author of Psalm 119. But before you wonder what a 176-verse, 3,000 year old poem written by a man who never saw a car or threw a bowling ball has to do with you, understand that God declares the relevance of His Word to every believer: "**All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness so that man of God may be adequately equipped for every good work**" (2 Tim 3:16).

Paul says that all Scripture is profitable! Yes, even the genealogies and temple laws. This word "profitable" means useful, advantageous, or practical. The God-breathed Scriptures were designed to be practiced.

You may then wonder, "But the psalmist comes from another era in time. How can I relate to a man who passed away 3,000 years ago?" Man's need has not changed in the last 3,000 years. The psalmist struggled with the same passions of the flesh that you battle. The advancement of technology, communication, and modern culture may deceive you into believing that man's nature has somehow improved or his needs changed, but being more civilized does not equal being more righteous. If anything, modern advancement in travel, communication, and warfare has fooled man into thinking that he is now somehow morally better for it, yet his nature has not changed. He struggles with the same sins, needs the same Savior, and will only find strength in the same Word.

My goal is not to impress you with a skillful homily, or tickle you with flattering quips and nifty clichés. Instead, I want to take you on a journey. A journey to the heart of a man who loved God's Word with every cell in his being. We will watch how he made God's Word the lifeblood of his soul. We will try to understand why his heart throbbed in dripping affection for truth, at times so hard that he felt it would break (Ps 119:145).

I cannot plant love for God's Word in the soil of your heart. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. But I can explain the text and show you the heart throb of the psalmist so that you cannot close this book without knowing the path to loving

God's Word.

Today many pastors plague their pulpits with a cloud of frilly anecdotes instead of crystal truth. They use the Word as a launching pad for opinion instead of the centerpiece of worship. But the Word of God should be made so clear that you can feel it's pricking arrows and taste its invigorating waters. If your soul feels wilted and dry, may the Holy Spirit use His Word to stoke the dying embers of your hardened heart and fan a blaze so fierce that others cannot come near without igniting themselves. And if you already deeply love God's Word, may God use the following pages to enrich your affection for the Bible yet more. If God uses these remaining chapters in your heart half as much as he has used Psalm 119 in mine, then my mission has accomplished its purpose ten times over.

[God's Word is] a store of manna for God's pilgrim children...The great cause of neglecting the Scriptures is not want of time, but want of heart, some idol taking the place of Christ. Satan has been marvelously wise to entice away God's people from the Scripture. A child of God who neglects the Scriptures cannot make it his business to please the Lord of Glory; cannot make Him Lord of the conscience; ruler of the heart; the joy, portion, and treasure of the soul...If the Bible be used aright by anyone, it will be to him the most pleasant book in the world.⁴

~Robert C. Chapman~

May His words be more pleasant to you than life itself.

⁴ Robert L. Peterson and Alexander Strauch, *Agape Leadership: Lessons in Spiritual Leadership From the Life of R. C. Chapman* (Littleton: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1991), 15-16.