

 for the week of 27 September: Life Words

Acts 17.11-12: *And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul’s message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth. 12 As a result, many Jews believed, as did many of the prominent Greek women and men.*

The Bible is still the world’s best-selling book. 88% of Americans own a Bible. Yet despite the Bible's prolific distribution most people, who participate in a local church, cannot recite the 10 commandments (in any order), feel inadequate to study the Scriptures on their own, and spend less than 10 minutes each week (including Sunday) in any kind of Bible reading. Few have any kind of disciplined study time. When asked, “Why do you think the Bible is important?” the common response is, “It is a spiritual book.”

The Bible is a spiritual book. Its many writers, spanning at least 1600 years, were inspired by the Spirit of God to give us His word— a word for all people everywhere and for all time. It is a spiritual book but it is not a magical book. Scripture is not a good luck talisman that secures good fortune by virtue of its possession. Biblical possession is not 9/10 of the law—receptivity and responsiveness are! Because the Bible is a spiritual book, we need the Holy Spirit to help us understand it. However, we also have a part to play— and the people of Berea set us a good example here.

They were willing to learn: they received the message. Before we read the Bible, we need to be quiet in God’s presence and ask Him to speak to us. Some years back, Microsoft had an ad campaign for their software products which asked the right question: “Where do you want to go today?” The question implies movement and destination. Followers of Jesus Christ will start their day asking the same question with the addition of one little word, “Where do You want me to go today?”

Secondly, they were disciplined: they examined the Scriptures every day. This is where Bible study and reading notes can be so helpful. According to your age, ability, and appetite there are notes and commentaries that can guide you through the entire Bible, through a particular book, or through a section of Scripture.

Thirdly, they were obedient: many of them believed and acted on God’s word. The Scriptures are not for those who are merely curious or desirous of more knowledge. It is a book that is written to change lives. It provokes a response; it expects action.

The danger in many biblically based churches is that we become congregations who enjoy “message-tasting.” Message-tasters are those who like to sample the truth and authority of Scripture yet rarely read it, study it, submit to it, or act on it. Message-tasting abounds on Sunday morning when most gather to worship and hear the Scriptures and a message. Messages are then subjected to a “spiritual palette” which has some similarities with its cousin, “wine-tasting.” This palette includes color (did it make me feel good?), consistency (is it consistent with what I like to hear?), and content (was it interesting to me?).

Several years ago a self-confessing Christian, from the congregation I pastor, said to me, “I am going to leave your church because your sermons don’t do anything for me.” We talked for a while and then I asked two questions, “Do you read the Bible regularly during the week? Do you take time to pray and ask God to speak to you and teach you His truth during the week?” The answers to both questions were, “No, not really.” I concluded our conversation by observing, “How do you expect my words to have any significance for you if you have no hunger for the Word of God to impact in your life during the week?”

Make every effort to set aside time for God each day... Ask Him to speak to you as you read a passage from the Bible... Expect Him to speak to you.. Act on what you hear and learn. There are no authentic paradigms for vital Christian living which ignore this simple yet essential exercise.

Enjoy your LifeGroup!

Mark

 getting to know one another…

Who were your best friends in elementary school?

What was one of your favorite stories to hear/read growing up? Why?

 reflecting on what Scripture says about Scripture/the Word of God…

**NOTE**: While the following passages originally referred to the Old Testament Scriptures, we embrace and recognize that they now cover both the Old and New Testaments.

**Read Acts 17.11-12**. What set the Berean fellowship apart from others? Why is this so important? Does this challenge your own habits? Why or why not?

**Read 2 Timothy 2.15**. What does it mean to “accurately handle the word of truth”? How do YOU do this?

**Read Colossians 3.16**. What does it mean for the “word of Christ to dwell richly within you”? How does it “get in”? Implicit in this verse is an admonition concerning how we “correct” one another — that Scripture is the context and the content of our admonishment. Is this how you think about correcting someone? How can you do this without being “preachy” or legalistic?

**Read 2 Timothy 3.16-17**. There are 3 claims made about the Bible in this passage. What are they?

How does the Bible — a book— equip us for every good work?

**Read Psalm 19-7-11**. There are 6 “of the Lord” clauses here that each describes some aspect of Scripture as God’s Word. What are they? What do they promise you?

This psalm prizes the fact that God warns us through His Word (19.11). What is a warning? Why is a “warning” an expression of God’s care? Has God ever warned you through Scripture? If yes, please describe your experience briefly.

What is the reward promised in v11?

**Read Psalm 119.9-16**. What, according to these verses, is the basic consequence of not reflecting regularly on God’s Word? Do you agree? Why or why not?

Why does David emphasize “his heart” in vs 10 and 11? Why is it important to ensure our reflections on Scripture are not simply with our “head” but also with our “heart”?

What does it mean to “store up God’s Word in our heart” (v11)?

**Read Ephesians 6.17**. Here, amidst Paul’s discussion of the armor of God, he defines what the “sword of the Spirit” is. What does it mean for us to “take the sword” — the Word of God?

What are the benefits of wielding the “sword of the Spirit” for your life? Are there consequences if we ignore Scripture? Why or why not?

How can your LifeGroup encourage your devotional habits and reading/reflection on the Scriptures?

How can your LifeGroup grow as a community that treasures God’s Word in your weekly time together?

What steps can you take as a LifeGroup so that what was said of the Bereans (Acts 17.11-12) might be said of you?

 my prayer requests (think of what you want to share in advance)…

 praying for my group…

