

Study and Growth

What can study do for me?

- When the world considers resources that provide value, it often does so selfishly
- "What can this book do for me?" can be a self-centered question
- The real question, the deeper question might be "Will this book help me satisfy the desires of my flesh?"
- "Will it help me get what I want?"

- This is not the question we are asking today
- Believers with a total commitment to Christ want to know "How can the Bible help me to be what God wants me to be?"
- "What does God want and can I make what He wants what I want?"

- When the Bible is working in us, it is not often comfortable
- It tells us things we don't want to hear
- It makes demands that are hard
- It reveals weakness and rebellion in the reader
- It cuts and it evaluates and it passes judgement
- In it we find ourselves lacking and we are left with a choice
- Do we learn and obey or do we ignore and turn away?

- Let's make no mistake, God provides immeasurable comfort in His word
- He encourages and He strengthens in it, there is no doubt
- But if we are talking about what it can do, then change and alteration and transformation will be our key words
- For, as Jesus told us, God is using it to set us apart for His exclusive use
- This means He is changing us in it
- We sometimes call this change Christian growth, hence our lesson title

- Where, then, must we start?
- I suggest what could be regarded as a shocking passage in Hebrews...

Hebrews 4:12-13

12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

13 Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

- There are no other books that are described quite in this way
- This is a unique text
- The scripture we have - and that we're reading from today - is alive
- And it's powerful
- And it's truth can pierce us in a way that a sword can pierce armor

- But it doesn't just stop with the armor cut away
- It pierces through and beyond our physical bodies
- Making its way to the soul and spirit
- Laying open the hidden things of the heart and mind
- And determining the intentions hidden within them

- There is nothing selfish about this
- God uses His word to reveal things about us that represent reality
- While we give ourselves the benefit of the doubt, make excuses, and find justifications
- In the scriptures we are, as it says here, naked before Him
- There is nothing that we are, that He cannot see
- And the Bible reveals what He sees
- It makes us aware of the deep change that is required
- And acquaints us further with the only One who can make that change happen

- In it, we see that we can have victory
- Because in it the person of Christ is revealed

- There is another scripture that might help...

James 1:22-25

22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

- Whatever the scripture is revealing, God allows us to see it

- We begin to know "what manner" of person we really are
- And so we must not simply go about our business with this knowledge
- We must alter whatever it is that is wrong or ugly or out of place
- This means obedience
- And that obedience changes us deeply

- This is not a person who merely takes a passing glance at the scriptures
- He looks deeply
- He continues within it
- He digs in - meditates upon - reads and re-reads
- And that is what changes him

- No one changes that does not acknowledge change is needed
- Certainly the church is here to help, brothers and sisters nearby to offer their knowledge and experience
- Other books and online tools are helpful as well
- And God often provides parents and wives and husbands and other family members as a resource
- But we must also go to the Bible ourselves, to dig in deeply

- Because change is a blessing
- It draws us closer to God and shapes our character to be more like Him
- It alters us in just exactly the way that God intends
- And it is personalized, just for us

- With that being said, there is an alternative
- God could reveal the very same things
- He could provide the help of the church
- And family members and others
- And we could still walk away

- That could happen because we fear or dislike the deep cut of God's sword - the word of God
- And the thoughts and intents that its wounds reveal could be too disturbing for us
- Maybe we don't even want to look in its mirror?

- But disciples must
- For the scripture is what God is using to perfect, to complete us
- And it's likely this will be a painful process
- But one that cannot be avoided by any successful saint

- Then we can go back to Jesus' words and understand His prayer...

John 17:17

17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

- The setting apart for which Jesus prayed is done by truth
- Not by that which we tell ourselves (which may not be true)
- Not by that which we hope is true
- Not by that which we wish were true
- Not by that which the world tells us (which almost certainly isn't true)
- But by truth
- From a God who sees and knows all

- If we have courage to see and to obey
- We will be changed for good

- What sort of things are in God's word that change us?
- One of my favorite lists can be found in the New Testament...

Philippians 4:8

8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

- Without God's word, thinking in this way is very difficult
- The things of the world are rarely true or honest or just or pure or lovely or of good report or virtuous
- It is the scripture - and those committed to being changed by scripture - that show us what these things are
- So, time will need to be set aside for finding them
- Deep cuts may be needed
- A long look in the mirror may be warranted

- But if we want what God wants
- The Bible will do great things for us
- It will transform us for good

- Let's spend our last few minutes together talking about some hands-on resources
- We have established successfully that we need to study
- Let's ask a few other questions

- What are some reliable tools for the job?
- Where do we find them?
- How can we put them to work for us?

- Those are questions we'll be asking today, because 2 Timothy 2:15 tells us...

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

- That means...

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a worker who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth."

- There is going to be work involved
- And we need special tools
- The wonderful news is that God has provided them in our language
- We have to pick them up and get started

- The most basic options, which I know you can pick up from our great Christian bookstore on-island Faith Gift Shop

- Are a study Bible
- And a concordance
- I like the Thompson Chain Reference Bible
- And a Strong's Concordance

- If you want to go a little further, you can pick up an Easton's Bible Dictionary

- I have to say, it has been a while since I have used these resources in book form
- Every day I use apps and online resources
- And I've mentioned it before, but I start with the Blue Letter Bible
- You can find it in the App Store and on Google Play
- It is described this way on their website...

"Blue Letter Bible is a free, searchable online Bible program providing access to many different Bible translations including: KJV, NKJV, NLT, ESV, NASB20, NASB95 and many

others. In addition, in-depth study tools are provided on the site with access to commentaries, encyclopedias, dictionaries, and other theological resources."

- I recommend this app in particular because of the accompanying study resources
- They are easy to use and ready at hand

- The site began back in 1995, developed by a group of conservative Christians from California
- I have watched it grow for at least the last 10 years, really getting better every year

- You can visit their site at blueletterbible.org, blueletterbible.org
- All of the same resources from the app are available there

- Here's where I start with that app
- I use the side-by side feature without fail
- I keep the King James Version on the left and use either the ESV or NASB on the right
- These options are available in the "Bibles" menu

- This provides another reading of the text at an instant
- I find myself reading ever verse twice, from left to right
- If you haven't done this before, give it a try
- The additional perspective will help your understanding and retention

- If you click on any verse (in the app)
- Or click on "tools" on the web
- You'll find a helpful set of options
- There is an interlinear concordance
- This focuses on the usage of the Greek or Hebrew words in the text
- And gives you the other usages throughout scripture
- As well as providing definitions

- Definitions for Greek and Hebrew words and phrases are also provided in the dictionaries tab
- There are a variety of options to choose from there
- I find Easton's and Vine's to be particularly good
- You'll have to browse a little to get familiar with the way these tools work
- This is for additional insights on the original languages
- Which have the nuance that is needed to really understand

- I also avail myself of the cross references

- These are verses addressing the same general topics or subject matter
- They may also mention the same people or the same story or places in the world
- Whatever it may be, this cross reference list provides additional Biblical insight
- And it will keep you in the scriptures to find answers to whatever questions you may have

- Commentaries are also quite important
- They have both text and audio commentaries available in the BLB app
- I use the text commentaries first and foremost
- The great thing about them: they are from reliable, orthodox sources
- Not every commentary you search up on Google is as reliable as you might like
- This tool keeps things very conservative
- I think most of them will really help you

- These are not infallible sources
- But they are decent sources
- The same encouragement always applies: go back to the word
- And compare commentaries
- Sometimes they will have unique perspectives that fill in whatever gaps you may notice

- There are miscellaneous resources on the BLB site and app too
- These are maps timelines or other helpful graphics that may provide understanding
- I use these rarely, but when I have, they have helped

- Moving away from the resources strictly, let's move to some principles

1. Always consider the immediate context
2. Always consider the historical context
3. Always consider the "entire Bible" context
4. Define words and phrases
5. Find out what other people have said
6. Consider deeply (meditate)
7. Pray

- Read the word carefully
- Get all the information you can
- Ask important questions
- Do your homework
- Study is to be diligent