

CHRISTIAN HOME AND FAMILY LIVING

by

Frances Vander Velde

Copyright © 1959

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

Psalm 1:1-3; Acts 17:1-12; I Timothy 4:13-16; II Timothy 3:14-17

The Lord gave the Word (Psalm 68:11)

Are you bored with the Bible?

What a question to ask a Christian! Yet it is an open secret that the Bible is a closed book in many homes today, and there must be a reason for it. We worry about it, apologize for it, some write articles and books about it, but we continue to neglect the Bible and to feel uncomfortable. We say: Later, tomorrow we will read it—but tomorrow never comes! Who can be sure that boredom is not at the core of our neglect of the Scriptures?

We need to face our own reflection in the mirror of life and ask: Why do I neglect the Bible when I have been taught, and believe, that **“holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost”** (II Peter 1:21) to give me the Word of God (Acts 16:32)?

Could the trite excuse of having no time to read possibly be a camouflage for the boredom we really feel when we dutifully pick up the Bible for a few quick verses, or read it for devotions at the table with one eye on the clock and one foot ready to leave for further necessary or interesting activities?

Do we feel the interest for the Scriptures that we do for a new novel, or even the daily paper, under whose spell we can sprawl for hours? Yet the Bible is good reading—the best in every way, the experts tell us. Do we read it mainly for emotional or intellectual stimulus, for “a lift” or “in a pinch”? Do we read only certain passages that make us feel good, and so create a Bible within the Bible? Such a limited use of the Bible could make it a boring book for us.

Much as we may neglect it, we dare not be without a Bible in our homes; likely we have several—one for each member of the family. Our ideal is that every home in America shall have a Bible; we envision the printed Word for the world. But could it be that we are tinged with superstition and place the Bible on the shelf for security, much as the heathen wears his amulets or the soldier his good luck charm?

This, then, is our dilemma: we are instrumental in giving the Bible to the world, and we are apparently bored with it ourselves; we dare not do without it, and we do little with it; we are occasionally conscience stricken, but we are too busy with the things of time to lay hold on eternal values.

Though we may neglect the Bible we cannot dismiss or avoid it. Parts, or the whole of it, are found everywhere—in homes and hotels, on ships, in libraries, schools and churches, in newspapers and on billboards, in music and literature, on the air waves and the screen, on the lips of the careless, in the hearts of men. It is estimated that more than twenty million copies, printed in over a thousand languages, are distributed each year throughout the world.

Although the Bible is the most available book in all the world, it is not an ordinary book.

All other books express the thoughts and opinions of men, but the Bible expresses the truth of God (John 17:17). The Bible originated in a small oriental country, was written to supply the needs of an oriental people in the shadowy past, yet it comes with power today because the Bible is “*God-breathed*” with life and love and wisdom.

We are implicitly told that God spoke through those who wrote it, so giving to them His message for the world for all time (I Corinthians 9:10; 10:11; II Timothy 3:16). In spite of man’s neglect, opposition and skepticism (Jeremiah 36:20 ff.; Acts 17:5,6, 32) it has and will maintain its transforming hold on the life of the world (Isaiah 55:5, 11; Matthew 24:35).

The Bible is primarily a spiritual book. It speaks plainly yet with thrilling accent to those who are spiritually discerning (I Corinthians 2:11-16).

Contrary to the opinions of many, the Bible is not a series of laws that shackle the spirit, but is the truth that makes men free (John 8:36). The Scriptures are the presentation of grace, the gift of God for the redemption of sinners (Acts 14:3; II Corinthians 5:19). It has been aptly said that the purpose of the Bible is “To bring men to Christ, to build them up in Christ, and to send them out for Christ” which we also learn from II Timothy 3:14-17. The Bible, in reality, contains a double message for all who read: a call to faith (Romans 10:17) and a call to action (Romans 2:13; James 1:22-25).

It is impossible to study the Bible without being conscious that it makes a direct appeal to the conscience and will; that it actually “dictates to him what he must believe and do. It comes with commanding force. Calvin was very insistent on this point. If the Bible had spoken there was but one thing to do —obey.” *

* From *The Basic Ideas of Calvinism*, p. 45, by Dr. H. Meeter.

If we do not respond with obedience, or by putting our faith into practice, the Bible virtually becomes a sealed book, or a Book that bores rather than edifies.

The Bible is the only Book that is indispensable. Whittier said about the Book of books:

We search the world for truth . . .

* * * * *

We come back laden from our quest
To find that all the sages said
Is in the Book our mothers read.

What would we know about God and the Saviour of mankind without it? It tells us how to live a complete and happy life, and how to die in full assurance of eternal life. The busier we are the more desperately we need it. The wheel of life spins at a dizzy pace, with resultant tension and weariness.

Life is hard on everyone today: on fathers, even on children, and perhaps not the least on mothers who, instinctively and because they love their families, want to do and be everything for everyone. And everyone needs much these days! Few people realize that the greater the tensions of life, the greater is the need for a quiet time with the Source and Replenisher of life.

Because modern life is full to overflowing with interests and activities, we cannot wait until we find time, but will have to take time, to read the Bible. We always take time for the things we want to do, whether it is a “coffee klutz,” or a complicated new recipe. Who has greater freedom than the woman in the home as to how she will spend her time? It would be hard to fill the full schedule of Eleanor Roosevelt, the “First Lady of the world,” yet we are told that she reads her Bible every day. Bible reading should be as normal for a Christian as any other activity. It is a good habit which must be cultivated.

Bible reading is an art not learned without strict discipline.

In addition to setting aside a daily, definite time for it, we should choose a quiet place (Matthew 6:6) so that we may be free from distractions. That we may have an “**ear to hear**” God speak to us in the stillness, we must deliberately shut the world out, whatever our world may be. We must have a reverent attitude toward this only “*God-breathed*” Book, and humbly open it “on our knees.” We begin with prayer that the Holy Spirit may guide us into the truth, for He who first inspired can best teach the meaning of His own work (Psalm 119:18; John 15:26; 16:13-15).

He stands beside the lowliest who ask in faith (Luke 11:13; John 16:23, 24) to be taught of Him (John 14:26).

Prayer is our way of speaking to God; the Bible is God’s way of speaking to us (John 17:8) and, as D. L. Moody once said, “We had better let God do most of the speaking.”

We must have faith that God is speaking, that His Word is final truth (John 14:6; I Thessalonians 2:13); therefore we do not search the Scriptures for support for our own ideas but with an earnest, eager, open mind to know the whole truth.

Bacon once said that some books are to be tasted, others chewed and digested. The Bible is a book that cannot be known or understood without being chewed and digested. If it is to be the central and moving force in our lives it must be correctly and systematically studied. There are various methods of Bible study which we may follow with profit.

There is the special verse or passage method which is used in the preaching of the Word on the Lord's Day; there is the popular study by books; the study of sections, for example, the gospels, each of which is needed to make the picture of the person and the work of Christ complete.

We can use the historical method, or the Bible can be studied by periods into which it divides itself. It can profitably be studied biographically, as many women's groups do when they study the women of the Bible; or by a topical method such as we are employing in the present series of studies on Christian living. Here we begin with problems and subjects which most vitally affect life and its relationships. This method definitely brings the Bible into the problems of today.

As we search all of Scripture, its various teachings and examples throw light, like so many windows, upon each problem. And as its many facets (Hebrews 1:1, 2) come to light, we grow in awareness and appreciation of God, His Word, and the necessity of living the truth. No one continuous method should be used to the exclusion of others, but every method helps us grow in the understanding of the Truth, provided we study the Bible in the process.

The Ethiopian eunuch needed guidance, and he received it from Philip the evangelist. For personal serious Bible study we also should make use of aids.

A good, readable Bible, preferably one with references, is the chief requisite; a good commentary, a Bible dictionary and a concordance—especially if the topical method is followed—are sufficient to begin with. Knowledge gained from Christian tradition, the current talk of the church and the Christian press have high value, but nothing takes the place of personal, prayerful study of the Scriptures.

Luther was concerned as more books came from his pen, that they would in any way replace Bible reading. Calvin said, "There be but few who hear Him speak in the Scriptures," and that the Word of God alone is authoritative. Commentaries are helps, not final authorities. The best explanation of Scripture is Scripture, as is demonstrated by the topical method of study. This method is valuable only insofar as we read all related Scriptures and search for, and meditate on, each reference which applies.

We learn from the Berean Christians that to know the Bible we must read it.

The Bereans were commended to us for an example, not because they pored diligently over the Talmud and Targum (Jewish commentaries) or argued brilliantly over the mechanics of theology (at which we are quite adept), but because they "**searched the Scriptures.**" The Berean spirit was one of prayerful, intelligent inquiry and research, not the skeptical, critical spirit which was sometimes present then (I Corinthians 3:1-5), as it is so often now. They read the Scriptures daily, with attention and intention (Acts 17:11).

Like them,

- We should search the Scriptures every day (John 5:39),
 - Meditate on them (Psalms 1:1, 2; 119:14-16; I Timothy 4:15),
 - Compare spiritual things with spiritual (I Corinthians 2:13);
 - Prove all things; hold fast what is good (I Thessalonians 5:21),
 - Receive the Word as the Divine authority for faith and practice (I Thessalonians 2:13).
- **“Open thou my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law”** was the daily prayer of the psalmist.
- **“Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures . . .”** (Luke 24:45).
- **“Thy words were found, and I did eat them,”** said the prophet, **“and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord of Hosts”** (Jeremiah 15:16).
- **“Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path,”** rejoiced the psalmist. He said also, **“Thou wilt show me the path of life; in thy presence is fulness of joy”** (Psalm 16:11).

Today **“all Scripture is given . . . that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works,”** and **“he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”**

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How do you account for the neglect of Bible Reading and study which is common today?
2. How important is the Bible to God? What does this imply for us, and why?
3. Is it right to modernize the Bible in respect to translations? There have been some thirty-four translations of the Bible, including revisions. How many translations can you name? What translation is generally used? Do you think that it is the best one available?
4. What does the word Bible mean? What unifies the Bible? Do you know that approximately half of the books of the Bible can be read in one half hour or less? Is it best to read the Bible straight through or by books? Where would you start?
5. What attitudes of heart and mind are necessary to fruitful Bible study?
6. List aids to Bible study. Are they in your church library?
7. What is the purpose of the Bible?
8. Is it possible in this day and age to set aside a definite daily time for Bible study? What about mothers with small children?
9. Suggest ways in which to study the Bible. What do you think is good about each one? Is it wise to choose the one method you like best and stay with it? Why, or why not?
10. What method of Bible study would you say that Jesus was using in Matthew 5; 13; Luke 24:27; Apollos in Acts 18:24-28; Priscilla in Acts 18:26; Peter in Acts 3:12 ff.; Stephen in Acts 7?
11. At the beginning of a new year it might be well to take inventory of your method of Bible study. Is it effective? How can it be improved?

12. A young home missionary said not long ago at a missionary meeting that our women who have been taught in the Christian faith for so many years, should be able to conduct their own Bible study in their societies and so give their busy pastor a few more hours for mission endeavors. What is your opinion? What makes a person capable of teaching and leading the Bible discussion in a group such as yours?

13. What does it mean to “search the Scriptures”? How much of the Bible did the Bereans have?

14. What, according to the following references, does the Bible mean to us: Psalms 27:1-4; 36:9; 119:9-11; Jeremiah 15:16; John 1:1; 5:39, 40; 17:17; Acts 14:3; I Corinthians 3:2; I Thessalonians 2:13; I Timothy 4:16; II Timothy 3:14-17; Hebrews 4:12; II Peter 1:19?

~ end of chapter 13 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
