

BaptistWay Press® Adult Online Bible Commentary

By Dr. Duane Brooks
Pastor, Tallowood Baptist Church
Houston, Texas

Studies in 14 Habits of Highly Effective Disciples

Lesson One

Bible Study

Focal Text

Psalm 119:9-16; Acts 17:10-12; 2 Timothy 3:14-17

Background

Psalm 119:9-16; Acts 17:10-12; 2 Timothy 3:14-17

Main Idea

Disciples read, study, memorize, and live out God's word.

Question to Explore

How can I grow in my knowledge and application of God's magnificent word?

Quick Read

We will not become strong and mature disciples accidentally. One of the necessary ingredients in the recipe for spiritual growth is the knowledge and direction gained through the disciplined study of the Bible.

Introduction

Imagine my disappointment! My parents, brothers, and I were living in Germany, thousands of miles from the rest of our family, when a Christmas package arrived from my Aunt Alice in Chicago. Though she lived with her five children on a modest income, on previous holidays she had sent amazing gifts. Once, she mailed a rocket that sent out a parachute when it reached a certain altitude. Another year there was a bird-shaped kite. But this year's wrapped presents for me and my brothers looked remarkably and inexplicably like books. And they were.

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When we opened them, I discovered that my aunt had sent me a Bible of all things – and not just any Bible, but a Children’s Living Bible. Not *The Way*, the teen version which my brothers had received. I was trying to imagine how I could carry a *children’s* Bible into my seventh grade Sunday School class at Rhein Valley Baptist Church. My peers with their age-appropriate Bibles would laugh me out of the room.

But that gift changed my life. In the absence of television, living with few English speaking friends, I had a great deal of time to read. And when I started reading the Bible, I could not put it down. As I read, studied, and memorized the Scriptures; I grew as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Two years later, I preached my first sermon from that same Children’s Living Bible.

To be disciples of Jesus Christ, we will need to cultivate the habit of staying in the Scriptures. Our study this week features three different texts to inform our journey of walking in God’s word. First, we consider a section of the great 119th Psalm which speaks of a disciple’s devotion to the Scripture. Second, we look at the example of one group of new disciples in the city of Berea who took the Scriptures to heart. Third, we will look at Paul’s teaching about the Scriptures to his young protégé Timothy.

Commentary

Start with the Scriptures (Psalm 119:9-16)

“How many verses in Psalm 119?” a new friend and prospective church member quizzed me. “176,” I responded, relieved that I knew the answer. In my personal devotions I read one Psalm each day, beginning with Psalm 1 on January 1st each year.

Some psalms are harder to finish in a sitting than others, but no other one comes close to Psalm 119. It consists of twenty-two different sets of eight verses, with each new section beginning with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Our passage begins with *beth*, the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet and each verse has something to say about God’s word to his people.

If you are a regular reader of the Psalms, you may have noticed that they are not all the same. Some of them call for praise, while others offer a lament. Others are sapiential with a proverbial ring. Still others tell the story of a single servant of God. Sometimes the writer calls us into community, reminding us that we worship together.

This psalm answers an important question: What are we to do with God’s words recorded for us in the Bible? The psalmist answers by showing us that attention to the Scriptures guards our hearts against sin. We store up the Scriptures in our hearts, learn them, declare them, meditate on them, and delight in them. I once attended a conference where retired professor Jack MacGorman held up his Bible before he spoke and said, “The Bible has always been for me a meeting place with God.” It was for the psalmist. It has been for me. Is it for you?

D. L. Moody said about the Bible, “This book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book.”¹ For the psalmist, it was the former. The psalmist wanted to remain pure before God. How was this even possible? “By living according to God’s word” (119:9).

So it is not enough just to know the Bible. We must put it into practice. As James said, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (James 1:22). As the psalmist seeks God he is determined not to stray from God’s commands.

Not content just to have a scroll of the Scriptures in hand, the psalmist determined to hide God’s word in his heart so that he might not sin. The exponential growth of information in our age through the explosion of technology has given us more opportunities to learn than perhaps in any previous generation. But with television and the Internet, there is also more access to profanity and pornography than at any time in my life.

Technology is not essentially good or evil. We can use our phones and computers to learn God’s word as easily as we can use them as instruments of sin. For sixteen years a friend of mine and I have run five miles together on Saturday morning. We have always prayed for each other and held each other accountable. But just this year we have recommitted to grow in our discipleship by memorizing the Scriptures and reciting them to each other. Every week we learn new verses.

Somehow I thought that since we were in our fifties we might be limited in our ability to memorize. We have not found this to be the case. God’s word has come alive to us as we have hidden it in our hearts and minds.

No matter how well we know the Bible, we have much to learn. Who will be our teacher? It turns out that the Author of the book still speaks to those who will listen. So the psalmist praises God and asks him to teach the decrees of Scripture. We can only use the Scriptures if we know them. God teaches us so that we may declare his decrees and recount them. He speaks his words to us and we speak them to others. Before long we begin to treasure the Bible as God’s holy word to us.

I once met a distant relative when I was on sabbatical in the mountains of East Tennessee. My cousin pulled out a family Bible held together with duct tape. She had laminated the family pages because they were delicate. She told of how her great grandmother had sat on the porch and read the Bible every day.

This treasure in duct tape reminded me of my spiritual heritage. One of my family members suggested we might buy the Bible. Though my relative who offered to purchase it has considerable means, it occurred to me that this Bible is priceless to our sweet cousin in Tennessee.

For the psalmist, meditation led to delight. It is one thing to read the Bible, and another to memorize it. But what if we meditated on it? I have kept a practice over the years of reading through the Bible each year. Several in our church have joined me in this practice. There is great benefit in reading through the Bible.

One year, though, it occurred to me that it would be possible to get through the whole Bible without it getting through to me. It is one thing to walk through the great forest of the Scriptures, but it is another to stop for a while and study a tree. As a change of pace, I decided to read one book of the Bible every day for a month. By the time I read Ephesians 31 times I knew it better than I ever had.

As we meditate, we can consider God's ways (119:15). It is important for the Bible to never become drudgery to us – just another chore to finish. Like the psalmist, we can take great delight in the thought that God speaks to us. In this way we learn not to neglect the Bible. Many have observed of those whose Bibles are falling apart; that they are likely *not* falling apart themselves.

Study the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-12)

Our New Testaments contain two letters in Paul's correspondence with the believers in Thessalonica. In its own way this is remarkable because he was only there for three Sabbath days, a time span of less than three weeks. Paul had gone to Macedonia in response to a vision.

First, he had ministered in Philippi to a wealthy woman of trade named Lydia; then to an anonymous slave girl; and then to a jailor and his family (Acts 16). Leaving the jail, the believers, and the city of Philippi; Paul and his companions landed in Thessalonica (17:1-9). There Paul reasoned with those in the synagogue and saw some who were persuaded. But Paul and his companions also faced detractors who started a riot in the marketplace. Paul and Silas escaped at night to a neighboring village called Berea. There, too, Paul preached in the synagogue, but met a vastly different response.

Luke says the Berean Jews were of more noble character. Notice the evidence he adduces to prove his evaluation of them. First, they received Paul's message with great eagerness. Since these noble practitioners of Judaism were awaiting the Messiah, this news of his arrival was the best news of all to them.

Where is the anticipation of God's word in our churches today? I love the story of the lady who noticed a guest sitting near her in church. The pastor preached a very long sermon and the guest dozed off. When the service finally ended, the lady decided to introduce herself to the guest. Waking him, she smiled and said, "I'm Gladys Dunn." He smiled and said, "So am I."

On a recent trip, I went to a church filled with young families. Their pastor routinely preaches for forty-five minutes to an hour, but there was no visible impatience or audible

complaint about the length of the sermon. These young adults apparently hungered for more of God's word to them. In our fast food culture we may even want our sermons to be quick. Pastors are responsible to be good stewards of time and to teach the Scriptures. How delightful, though, to see people eagerly receive the good news which God has given us.

Second and even better, these Bereans did not just take Paul's word for it. Instead they examined the Scriptures every day to verify Paul's words. Perhaps the attraction to cults could be avoided if the teachings were tested against God's word. When the Bereans confirmed Paul's message they decided to believe in Christ. Not only did many of the Jews believe, but as at Antioch (Acts 11:19-26), Greeks believed. In fact, Paul and Silas made inroads into the leadership of the city.

The Scriptures were received by both men and women of prominence in that city. Detractors from Thessalonica caught wind of this movement and followed Paul there. Once again, Paul's proclamation of the truth forced him to leave town. But two of his associates in ministry, Silas and Timothy, were less controversial. They stayed and taught the new believers to continue the work of disciple-making in Berea.

Stay in the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:10-17)

Near the end of Paul's life and ministry, he saw the deterioration of society. He urged Timothy to differentiate himself by remaining in the things he had learned in the Scriptures, remembering who had taught him, and realizing their powerful purpose for the kingdom. In effect, he said, "Stay in the Scriptures . . ."

Timothy had learned in Christian community from his mother and his grandmother, and from Paul. Paul said, "Stay in the Scriptures because they are able to make you wise for salvation; they will teach you and they will make you ready for the work God has for you."

In the disciple's "toolbox," the Scriptures are one of the best tools available to aid our growth as followers of Jesus. The key to our own, and to our family's discipleship, is found in the Scriptures. They possess the power to make us wise. They profit us by teaching, reproving, correcting, and training us in righteousness; which prepares us for the ministry God has for us.

Stott summarizes: "Let the word of God make you a person of God."² This is happening in the lives of disciples. But it will not happen if we do not stay in the Scriptures. Why should believers stay in the Scriptures?

1. God invests the Scriptures with power to make us wise for salvation through faith (2 Timothy 3:10-15). Paul conceded that the world around Timothy was in a lot of trouble. But Timothy could live a different story because he knew all about Paul who had mentored him. God had rescued Paul from trouble again and again.

From his childhood, Timothy had been taught the Scriptures. With a Gentile dad and a Christian mom and grandmother, he had two different streams of influence in his life. But for Timothy, the teachings had taken hold of his life.

Notice Paul's confidence in the Scriptures. The Scriptures are *able* . . . literally, dynamic, powerful ... to make us wise . . . and we need wisdom for salvation.

Bible scholar Christopher Wright tells a moving story about a friend from India who was led to Christ by reading the Old Testament. At the time, Wright's friend taught engineering at the local university. But he had grown up among the despised Dalit (outcast) community in his village.

His whole family had suffered greatly at the hands of the high-caste Hindus in the village. They had endured all kinds of harassment, violence, and injustice. This young man had a great thirst for revenge against his oppressors. So he worked very hard at school so he could get into the university. That would enable him to get a job with some influence and power; and then he could turn the tables on his enemies.

The day he arrived at the university he found a Bible translated into Telugu (his state language) in his room. He had never read the Bible, though he knew that it was the Christians' holy book. He opened it at random and started reading the story of Naboth and Ahab in [1 Kings 21](#). It is the story of the unjust King Ahab who uses his power to steal the land from Naboth, an ordinary farmer.

The story had so many familiar elements. "This was my story," he said. His family had also experienced theft of land, false accusations, and murders. They had suffered the brutality of the powerful waged against ordinary people.

But when he read on he was amazed to read about another man called Elijah. This man, in the name of some God of the Bible, denounced King Ahab, and said that he would be judged and punished by this God. This was astounding to him. This man had millions of gods within Hinduism to choose from. But he had never heard of such a god as he was reading about in this Bible. Here was a god who took the side of the suffering ones and condemned the government and the powerful for their wicked deeds. "I never knew such a god existed" were his exact words to Wright.

As this man continued to read the Bible, he learned about Jesus; his life and death and resurrection. He also learned about the need to forgive. But his road to conversion started by meeting the God who is just and who takes the side of the oppressed.

The Scriptures are able to make you wise unto salvation. Now presumably Timothy had already been justified. But he was still in the process of being sanctified so that he might ultimately be glorified. We must take care not to reduce the rich tapestry of salvation to

the single strand of justification. Being justified or made right before God is part, but not the whole.

2. God inspired the Scriptures to profit Christians by teaching, reproof, correcting, and training us (2 Timothy 3:16). God's word is both inspired and useful; it is profitable in many ways. The Scriptures are God-breathed – so they are life-giving to those who receive them. The same God who breathed life into Adam, breathes life into the Scriptures, and breathes life into us.

The Scriptures are profitable. The Bible is useful for teaching what is right; rebuking what is not right, correcting us so that we get right, and training us to stay right. Not only had Timothy learned from the Scriptures, he could teach what he had learned.

The Bible is also useful for reproof. When Jesus was tempted to sin, he had so filled his life with the word of God that he could answer every temptation with truth. If we memorize the truth and meditate on the truth, we are much less likely to be deceived.

The Scriptures also correct us. Ready or not, the Bible itself tells us the truth, corrects our misunderstandings, and reproofs us when we are wrong about the Bible or wrong about life. And all of this to put us back right with God so that we can stay right with God.

Thankfully, the Bible is useful to train us in righteousness. So the Bible is essential, not only to introduce us to Christ, but also to facilitate our spiritual formation. Training is better than trying.

When I wanted to run a marathon I didn't just go out and try to run it. I trained for it. Similarly, God is disciplining us through his word. We are not naturally righteous but we can become righteous. God is setting us right with himself through his words. So the Bible is the seed of the new life which produces the "much fruit" which God wants.

3. God provides the Scriptures to prepare us for ministry (2 Timothy 3:17). The result in our lives is that we are ready; fit and furnished. We are fit for the work God has given, and we are furnished or fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do. Perhaps some call it the "good book" because those who take it to heart do good. I have had the joyful blessing to pastor people steeped in the Bible.

At my first church, men like Roy Hudson and Alvin Marek; and women like Norma McIntosh and Edna Walston were saturated with God's word. When they prayed I heard the Bible. They were thoroughly Bibline.³ When there was a need, they wanted to help; and they were ready because they had inculcated the Scriptures into their thinking and into their living.

Conclusion

John and Emmy Davidson were a young family in our church. They were involved in one of our young adult Sunday School classes. Emmy had immigrated to the United States from Thailand several years before. They met and fell in love and were married by our associate pastor Larry Bertrand.

When I met Emmy about three years ago, I learned she had once been diagnosed with cancer. At this time she was in full remission. Then one day, after church, she told me that her cancer had returned. Within a few short months she went to be with the Lord. Her sponsor, who had welcomed her into the United States, was asked to speak at the funeral.

On the day of the funeral, John and his two young sons sat on the front row. As we conducted Emmy's service, her sponsor and friend read Psalm 23 in both Thai and English. As I looked down, John picked up the Bible and read along as the woman read. The passage came true as she read, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for you are with me." In that very moment and from now on, God is with him.

God is present and speaks to us as we read his word every day. This prepares us for life and every good thing God wants us to do; come what may.

Meet the Writer: Dr. Duane Brooks

Dr. Duane Brooks has been the pastor at Tallowood Baptist Church in Houston, TX since 1998. He has been a member of the Texas Baptist Executive Board and the Human Welfare Board of the BGCT. Dr. Brooks is currently Adjunct Professor at Houston Baptist University and serves on the Board of Regents at Baylor University. He holds the Ph.D. from Baylor University.

Duane was called to preach while in middle school in Germany and ordained in Great Falls, Montana. He has served as pastor in four Texas Baptist churches - New Hope Baptist Church in Cedar Park, Williams Creek Baptist Church in Mart, and Pleasant Grove Baptist Church in Rosebud. Duane and his wife, Melanie, have two sons, Graham and Chase, and a daughter, Casey.

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This*.

¹"Either this book will separate you from your sins, or your sins will separate you from this book." (D.L. Moody) Sourced from an essay Jim Denison wrote. Apparently Dwight Moody wrote these words in the flyleaf of a Bible that he gave to a friend.
(<http://resources.denisonforum.org/library/sermons/1358>)

² John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Second Timothy: Guard the Gospel* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1973), 104.

³ By Bibline I mean saturated with the Scriptures, "of the Bible," infused with the Scriptures. When a person is Bibline, they have so read and received the Scriptures into their own lives, that when they speak, the listener hears echoes of the Bible. For a further description of "Bibline" see "Mr. Spurgeon as a Literary Man," in *The Autobiography of Charles H. Spurgeon, Compiled from His Letters, Diaries, and Records by His Wife and Private Secretary*, vol. 4, 1878-1892 (Curtis & Jennings, 1900), 268.