

Jumpstarting Your Walk – Through God’s Word

Scripture Reading Psalm 19:7-11

Introduction

It seems hard to believe but we are on the cusp of a brand new year as Tuesday marks the start of 2019

I can’t remember a time when I have heard more people say they can’t believe how quickly 2018 went by

Has that been the case for you? I know it has been for me as this year seems to have just flown by!

While in reality Monday will pass into Tuesday the same as it does each and every week there is something special about ending one year and beginning another

We get the sense of starting over – that we can reset our lives and begin anew

And at New Year’s many people sit down and consciously decide what they would like to be different and make resolutions to that effect – bad habits to break, good habits to form, those sorts of things

The most common resolutions according to the internet are to eat healthier, exercise more, save more, and sleep more

With new beginnings in mind we are starting a new series called “Jumpstarting Your Walk” this morning

We all know that, as Christ-followers, we should be Christ-like and that when the people around us look at us they should see Jesus – so the believer’s list of resolutions should include “be more like Christ”

When we began our Christian walk we were kind of like the Tommy Lee Jones character in the movie No Country for Old Men who said “I always thought when I got older that God would sort of come into my life in some way”

We thought that as the years passed we would simply become more like Christ – but it didn’t happen because somewhere along the way we stalled and we stopped making forward progress toward spiritual maturity

And now we realize we need something to get us moving – a jumpstart, as it were, to get us rolling toward the spiritual maturity we seek

As we begin I want to be sure that we all understand that these disciplines we are going to be studying **are not the goals** – **they are simply means to the goal** of becoming more like Christ every day

In **1 Timothy 4:7-8** Paul tells Timothy, “...train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.”

So we see that godliness, Christ-likeness, is the goal – not the practice of these activities

You cannot cause yourself to become more like Christ; you can only train for it and allow the Holy Spirit to complete his work of sanctification in you

So we want to be careful not to fall into the trap of the Pharisees in believing that rigid adherence to a set of disciplines or dutiful performance of an activity makes one holy and acceptable to God

They are only means to an end that help make us available for the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit

As we begin to consider how we can jumpstart our Christian walk I can think of no discipline that will pay greater dividends than spending time in and with God’s Word

God could simply implant all the knowledge we need into the believer’s brain kind of like they did in The Matrix but he doesn’t – in his infinite wisdom, God decided that we must work at it through hearing, reading, and studying his Word

God still does the teaching but he requires that we put time and effort into the learning

And that means we must understand and accept our responsibility and then make it a priority

First, we will look at [Why Bible reading is important](#), then [How we should read the Bible](#), and lastly [Some benefits of reading the Bible](#)

I. Why is Bible reading important?

There are many reasons why we could say studying the Word of God is important but I want to simply mention four of them this morning

God said it

The first and perhaps the most important reason every believer should regularly pay attention to God's Word is because it is indeed *God's Word* – **because God said it**

When we speak of God's Word we typically mean God's **written** Word, **the Bible**

In other words, the 66 books that make up the Bible are God's written communication to mankind

And when the all-knowing, all-wise, all-powerful Creator of the universe speaks; it seems all too obvious to say that we should pay attention

It is God's primary means of communicating to us

Second, **the Bible is God's primary means of communicating to us**

Some would say that they hear from God by other means such as when they are communing with nature

And it's true that God communicates through what we call the general revelation of his creation

And if we back up a bit from where Nathan just read to **Psalm 19:1-2** we see the psalmist proclaim this truth

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.

And **Romans 1:20** tells us that we can learn a great deal about God simply by looking around at the things that he made

But we have to acknowledge that the knowledge we can have about God through the general revelation of nature is limited

As Paul says in the Romans passage, we can learn about his "invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature" for instance

But we can't learn about how to relate to him or what he requires from us from general revelation

For that we need more specific communication and we get that from God's written Word which is his *primary* means of communication to us

We are commanded to

Third, believers should be diligent to read and study God's Word because **we are commanded to do so**

2Timothy 2:15 tells us –

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

Now, it's true that we don't see the explicit command, "Study the Bible" in that verse but it certainly is implied

If one is going to properly handle the "word of truth" they would need to be familiar with it; with its meaning and uses

And that necessarily requires understanding that only time spent in study can provide

Jesus spent time in God's Word

The fourth and last reason I want to mention for studying the Bible is because **Jesus did**

The name "Christian" means to be like Christ or to be a "little Christ" and it was first given to believers as a derogatory name by unbelievers to those of the church in Antioch because they lived lives that mimicked the life of Jesus

And if we truly want to be worthy of the name "Christian" we must endeavor to follow our Lord's example in all things which includes knowing, understanding, and properly applying God's Word

If we want our Christian walk to be all that it can possibly be we must give priority to the study of God's Word

II. How should we read the Bible?

Assuming that we recognize the importance of hearing from God and the nature and function of God's written Word

And assuming that we want to be obedient and like Christ we are naturally led to the question of how

How can we properly study the Word of God?

With openness and obedience

Probably the most important thing we can do is to begin with **an open heart and a willingness to obey**

We need to be like the psalmist in **Psalm 119:18** who says, *"Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law"*

We too must approach God's Word with openness and a willingness to see what God has to say and we need to ask God to direct his Holy Spirit to give us understanding of the things we read there

Still, we could spend our time reading and even studying Scripture, taking notes, and gaining knowledge or even just read it in a rote or routine manner but never allow the truths we see in its pages to have an effect on us

Pastor Stuart Briscoe once asked an audience he was speaking to, "What do you do with the commandments of Scripture?" only to have a little old lady raise her hand and say, "I underline them in blue."

And we can be just like that can't we? Acknowledging what we see without allowing it to have an effect on us

So we need to also approach God's Word with a heart of obedience

Look with me at **Psalm 119:34** where the psalmist plainly expresses the attitude we need to have when approaching God's Word, *"Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart"*

The Bible contains a great deal of knowledge and truth and a person can approach the Bible as literature or as history or in any number of ways without recognizing it as God's own words in written form

But, if we fail to recognize that the Bible is indeed God's own revelation and if we fail to approach it with a heart that is open to its truths and a willingness to obey what we find in its pages we should not expect God to reveal them to us

Desirously and meditatively

We also need to approach our study of the Bible **desirously and meditatively**

The psalmist writes in **Psalm 119:103**, *"How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth"*

Now, I can almost guarantee that you won't readily accept or even like everything you find in the pages of God's Word

When you approach the Bible with a willingness to have God speak to you directly you will be confronted with things you might initially wish to have remained ignorant of because they will require you to face the way things are

And they will likely require some sort of change on your part that may well be painful to you

So, we must ask God to give us a taste and a hunger for his Word

When we truly enjoy something we can't seem to get enough of it and we will take every opportunity to partake of it

Sometimes that happens right away without any effort on our part; other times it requires developing a taste for it through repeated exposure

I know that I can be resistant to new things and I often have to take time to think my way through even giving them a chance

And God's Word can be that way – especially when we are confronted with realities we might wish to avoid

But as we take time to contemplate and consider what God has to say we will begin to see that desire develop

Look with me at [Psalm 119:15-16](#) – *“I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.”*

To meditate on something means to turn it over in your mind – to think about it, to ask questions of it, to consider it from various angles

Certain animals like cattle are called ruminants because their digestive process requires them to regurgitate their food and chew on it a second time to get the full nutritional benefit from it

We also need to ruminate, or chew, on what we read from God’s Word throughout the hours and days after we have read a portion of it

You will often hear me say that if you aren’t thinking about what you’ve read for at least twice as long as you spent reading it then you are reading too much and I really believe that to be true

When I was in Bible school I took an Old Testament survey class and one of the requirements of the class was to read the entire Old Testament during the 16 weeks of the class which meant reading 8 chapters each and every day

And I did it – but that level of reading was relatively unfruitful because it didn’t allow any time to consider what was being read – it was just reading for the sake of reading – and it sometimes turned into a mindless scanning of the words

Read less at each sitting if you must and then take time to really and truly consider what you’ve read

Turn it over in your mind; think of ways to apply the truths or commands or examples you found there

Ask sincere questions of the text and think of possible answers to those questions – (don’t be afraid to ask, “So what?”)

As you do those things you will find that your sincere contemplation will lead you to see the **rightness** and the **fitness** of what you’ve read – you will begin to see connections and applications which will lead to your delighting in it

Prayerfully and persistently

Then we must approach our time in God’s Word **prayerfully and persistently**

Before you begin, ask God to open your mind to understand his truth like the psalmist does in [Psalm 119:18](#) –

“Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.”

Ask God to show you the wisdom and practical application in your life of the truths he reveals as we see in [Psalm 119:34](#)

“Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.”

Ask God to give you the same love for and commitment to his Word as the psalmist demonstrates in [Psalm 119:97](#) –

“Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.”

Because you will also need to approach God’s Word with persistence as the enemy will try to keep you from it

Many are the distractions that will vie for your attention as we see in [Psalm 119:37](#) and people who will try to derail your commitment as we see in [Psalm 119:23](#) and [Psalm 119:51](#)

And we ourselves will be tempted to turn to other answers so we need to pray for God to redirect our steps as we see in [Psalm 119:29](#)

So we need to continually ask God to keep us focused on his Word each day

But you also need to recognize that God knows you are human and he won’t disown you if you miss a day or two

As [Psalm 103:14](#) tells us – God knows how he made us and he doesn’t hold our frailties against us

If you miss a day or two or three, just pick up your Bible the next day and keep going

We all have the tendency to believe we are a complete and utter failure and simply give up altogether if we miss a goal but we need to remember that even one day a week in God’s Word is better than none and remain persistent

Regularly and systematically

So, we should approach our time in God's Word with openness and obedience, desirously and meditatively, prayerfully and persistently

And we should also approach our study in **a regular and systematic way**

I believe too much emphasis is put on the time of day that should be given over to reading God's Word

There are those who insist it should be the first thing we do each day – and there is merit in that approach

After all, there are undoubtedly advantages to having God's Word be the first thing you put in your mind each day and you will have the opportunity to meditate on what you've read all day

But what if you just aren't a morning person but rather a person who is sharpest in the evening hours or you find your lunch break to be the most conducive time to study?

My advice is to find your best time and give it to the Lord whatever time of day that might be

I think there is solid biblical support for giving God our best and I recommend not beating yourself up over trying to fit someone else's idea of what is "proper"

You know yourself so pick the time of day when the soil of your heart and mind is best prepared to let God's Word take root and bear fruit

It's far more important to be consistent so pick a time of day when you can properly give your attention to God's Word and commit to an amount of time to spend reading it and do your best to stick with it – be **regular** in your study

And then be **systematic** in your reading and studying according to your needs

There are probably more ways to approach God's Word than there are people on the planet and there is no single way that is the "right way" to do it

There are numerous plans that you can use to read through the entire Bible in a year

Some begin with Genesis 1:1 and have you read a certain passage each day in canonical order all the way through Revelation 22:21

I have prepared booklets that are available today that contain a plan that takes the reader through the entire Bible in the order that the events happened – what is called a **chronological reading plan**

You'll notice that I have not put dates on each day's reading because I don't think it's terribly important that the entire Bible be read in a year - it *is* divided into 365 days so if that's a goal of yours for 2019 you can use it that way

For others this may be a completely new discipline and perhaps it would be beneficial for you to begin slowly

To that end I have also provided a plan that will take you through the 260 chapters of the New Testament in a year with a commitment of only about five minutes of reading each day for five days each week

I have also included some websites on the note sheet that have all manner of Bible reading plans so that you can find something that works for you

One of the sites has plans for all kinds of topical studies that last for 7-days which would allow a person to focus on a particular topic of interest to them

As I said, there isn't any one "right" way to approach what to read but it is best if one uses some kind of systematic approach rather than picking a random passage each day

Just as a person's physical health would be negatively impacted by nibbling at whatever they came across or by eating just one particular food so can we have an unbalanced spiritual diet if we just simply graze around without having a planned diet or focus only on our favorite passages

Using a scheduled reading plan will keep you balanced in your reading and prevent inadvertent "biblical malnutrition"

So, pick a time of day and a plan and ask God to help you do your absolute best at sticking with it

Alone and with others

Lastly, be sure that your time in and with God's Word includes time spent **alone and with others**

Studying with others has a number of benefits:

You will benefit from **the insights of others** as their life experiences, interests, personalities, and so forth may cause them to see things from a different vantage point than you do and therefore give you a fuller understanding

Also, a gifted teacher will likely point out things that you otherwise would have missed and **take you deeper** than you might have been able to go on your own

Likewise, **your insights** will be beneficial to those you study with and your questions may well cause the others to look at the passage in a completely new light as they seek to answer your concerns

And there is value in **being accountable** to another person or a group

When we know others are counting on us we tend to do what is expected and having a group study can serve as an added **incentive** to being persistent in our study because we don't want to let anyone down

Then there is the **protection** that a group study can provide

It pays to have someone else or a group of people who can serve as a **check on our interpretations** so that we are careful to maintain a doctrinally correct understanding

Studying along with others is beneficial as is being under God's Word as it is preached

But we also need to study on our own

We would never think we could just eat a single meal on Sunday or a meal on Sunday and maybe another meal one other day and figure we're good for the week

No! We eat every day and most of us eat three times a day

And just as you couldn't expect to eat one meal a week and expect to be physically healthy, neither can you get all you need spiritually without a steady diet of the spiritual food that is found in the Word of God

When Satan was tempting Jesus after his 40-day fast and tried to goad him into turning stones into bread Jesus showed his familiarity with Scripture as he quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 saying in **Matthew 4:4** –

“Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Still, the national statistics for Bible reading aren't too good

According to Lifeway Research only 45% of people who regularly attend church also read their Bible more than once a week – and the survey doesn't say whether they are counting Sunday when they're in church as one of those times

And the same survey indicates that 20% of regular church attenders admit that they *never* read their Bible

Another survey by Barna indicates that just 14% of believers claim to read their Bible on a daily basis

With that kind of diet, it's no wonder that many of us have anemic Christian walks and one of the most sure ways a believer can jumpstart their walk is to simply spend time listening to what God has to say

III. Some benefits of Bible reading

Lastly, this morning I want to show you some of the benefits you should expect from regularly being in God's Word

First, according to **Romans 10:11-17** **saving faith** is a product of God's Word

And **2Timothy 2:15** tells us that Scripture is able to *"make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus"*

So, if you want to be a disciple-maker it would benefit you to know Scripture well enough to pass it along to others

Second, the Bible leads us to **sanctification** and **spiritual maturity**

Look with me at **John 17:17** where Jesus prayed – *"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth"*

And **1Peter 2:2** which says – *"Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk that by it you may grow up into salvation"*

And of course **2Timothy 3:16-17** – *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work"*

The Bible also provides us with **guidance** as we see in **Psalms 119:105** – *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path"*

And **Proverbs 6:23** says – *"For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life"*

We also gain **wisdom and understanding** from reading the Bible as we see in **Psalms 119:98** – *"Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies for it is ever with me"*

Or **Psalms 19:7** – *"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple"*

Then in **Psalms 19:11** we see that the words of God provide **protection** as do **Psalms 119:9-11**

And those who know and obey what God desires find **blessing** as we see in **Psalms 119:1-3**

You will also find **strength** for the hard times in its pages as we see in **Psalms 119:28** – *"My soul melts away in sorrow; strengthen me according to your word!"*

Joy, hope, and peace will also be found as you read and study God's Word

Psalms 119:111 says – *"Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart"*

Psalms 119:165 says – *"Great peace have those who love your law"*

And **Psalms 119:147** says – *"I rise before dawn and cry for help; I hope in your words"*

And those are just a handful of the benefits to be found for those who read, study, and obey God's Word

I encourage you to take some time to just walk your way through Psalm 119 in its entirety and to write down every benefit you find within its 176 verses concerning God's Word –

It's a worthy exercise that will give you incentive as you begin to read the Bible regularly and systematically

But there is also danger to be found in failing to spend time in God's Word

Look with me at **Hosea 4:6** which begins – *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge..."*

And ignorance may well cause even well-meaning believers to begin to **misinterpret or twist Scripture** to their own destruction as we see in **2Peter 3:16**

Since we can't really understand God's Word unless we study it there is danger in failing to do so

Conclusion

The Bible is commonly referred to as “The Good Book” and it has historically been valued as a source of wisdom and instruction

In reality, it’s the only source available that reveals the divine mind and will of God

And in a time where truth is considered to be relative and opinion masquerades as fact it can be difficult to know what to believe out of what is heard and read – so it’s comforting to know that there is a source of truth available to us

There was a time not so long ago when Bible reading and memorization were common practice –

There was even a time when the Bible was used as a textbook in the public schools and Scripture was often quoted in other school books to teach the students wisdom and morality

As the sole, written source of divine truth that reveals the mind of God, exposure to the Bible’s instructions, warnings, and encouragements was recognized beneficial to the individual and to society as a whole

So the Bible had a common place at home and in the public arena and people were naturally influenced by its teachings

Sadly, common Bible literacy has been replaced with widespread ignorance and apathy – even in our churches

And we are weaker for it

But it need not be that way

In today’s political climate we may not be able to restore the Bible to its former place in society but we do have the ability to renew our respect and love for it

And reading and studying the Bible is the primary way that you can jumpstart your Christian walk as we head into 2019

Like the psalmist in [Psalm 119:97](#) we can say – *“Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.”*

It matters very little which passage you choose to read or how much you choose to read each day – whether it be an entire book, a chapter, a paragraph, or even a verse as long as you are faithful and systematic in your reading and in consciously considering what you have read

Here are some practical tips to help you as you start:

- Pick a good, modern translation – here at Brick we “officially” use the ESV but the NIV or the NASB are also good choices as they use modern English that is far easier to understand than the old English of the King James
- Pick a time and place where you can read without distraction
- Pick a passage to read – ease into it – less is more if it allows you to keep going
- Have a pen and paper available to take notes and write down questions and insights for consideration
- And ask God to speak to you as you read and consider his Word

If you’re like me you will be able to come up with a dozen excuses for not starting immediately but if you simply get started and persevere, experts say that after 3 weeks of struggle you will have created a new habit

And we all know how difficult it can be to break a habit once it’s established – hence the number of New Year’s resolutions

Remember, there are Bible reading plans available on the organ and links on your note sheet should you wish to use them to find a plan that is better suited to your personal situation

Let’s pray