

PERSPECTIVE AND PRIORITIES

- A. Introduction: In this current series of lessons I am urging you to become a regular systematic Bible reader. The Bible is a book from God. Every word is God breathed or inspired by Him (II Tim 3:16). Regular reading will change your life because the Bible produces growth and transformation in those who read it.
1. I've given you a simple but effective way to approach reading the Bible. Focus on the New Testament. Read at least several days a week for 15-20 minutes. Read each book from beginning to end in as few sessions as possible. Don't worry about what you do not understand—just keep reading.
 - a. The purpose of this type of reading is to get familiar with the text because understanding comes with familiarity—and familiarity comes with regular repeated reading.
 - b. I'm also trying to help you understand the purpose of the Bible, along with what it will do for you. My hope is that these lessons will to inspire you to read the New Testament over and over. (We aren't ignoring the Old Testament. It is easier to understand when you're familiar with the New.)
 1. Through the pages of the Bible, Almighty God has revealed Himself and His plan to have a family. He created men and women to become His sons and daughters through faith in Jesus and made the earth to be a home for Himself and His family. Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:18
 2. Both the family and the family home have been damaged by sin. The Bible reveals that God has provided salvation from both the penalty and power of sin for all who believe on Jesus as Savior and Lord. II Tim 3:15
 3. Jesus came to earth two thousand years ago to pay for sin at the Cross. By doing so He opened the way for men and women to be transformed into sons and daughters of God. He will come again to renew and restore the earth to a fit forever home for Himself and His family. Rev 21-22
 2. For the past several weeks we've been focusing on the fact that regular systematic Bible reading changes your perspective or the way you see things, which then changes how you deal with life.
 - a. The Bible gives you an eternal perspective. An eternal perspective recognizes that there is more to life than just this life and that the greater and better part of life is ahead, after this life—first in the present invisible Heaven and then on this earth once it is made new.
 - b. In the life ahead there's reunion, restoration, peace, joy, fulfillment, healthy relationships, satisfying work, no more loss, pain, or death. Life will finally be what we all long for it to be. Rev 21:4
 1. When you become convinced (from the Bible) that nothing can come against you that is bigger than God, and that everything you see is temporary and subject to change by the power of God either in this life or the life to come, it will change how life affects you.
 2. When you learn to see this life in proportion to forever, it lightens the load of life's hardships. Have you ever heard the statement: Don't sweat the small stuff? Well, in comparison to eternity (the life after this life), it's all small stuff. II Cor 4:17-18
 3. The points we've made thus far bring up some reasonable questions. Does this mean that our present life is unimportant? What does it look like to live with an eternal perspective? How do you balance an eternal perspective with living a regular life? We're going to address these issues in tonight's lesson.
- B. None of what we've said so far means that this life is unimportant or that the Bible has nothing to say about temporal or earthly issues. There are many statements in the New Testament about how to live this life. However, an eternal perspective affects your priorities which in turn affects how you live your life.
1. Matt 6:25—Let's begin with some things Jesus said about perspective and priorities. Jesus exhorted His followers not to worry about where life's necessities will come from (food, drink, clothing).
 - a. Jesus urged His listeners to consider the birds and flowers. They don't plant or harvest. They don't work or make clothes. Yet they are fed and clothed by an unseen Source—your heavenly Father. Jesus said that if He takes care of them, then He will surely take care of you since you

matter to Him more than birds and flowers. Matt 6:26-32

- b. In this world we must have food and clothing, and we also must labor (put forth time and effort) to obtain life's necessities—planting, harvesting, cooking, cleaning, sewing, mending, etc. In the modern world this often means holding down a job and getting a paycheck.
 1. Jesus said don't worry about whether you'll have enough. Worry comes from a Greek word that means to be distracted. Jesus was telling His listeners: Don't be distracted from the fact that you have an unseen Source—your heavenly Father—who will take care of you.
 2. Note the connection between your perspective and how you deal with life. When your focus is only on earthly or seen things you worry (have fear and anxiety), because it's all temporary and subject to corruption and loss. But when your focus is on the unseen reality that God your Father will take care of you, you can be confident in the face of need.
2. In the last several lessons we looked at a statement Paul made. He called his many troubles momentary and light. This perspective came from looking at (mentally considering) what he couldn't see. The only way you can see what you can't see is through the Bible. II Cor 4:17-18
 - a. There are two kinds of things we can't see—things that are invisible or beyond the perception of our physical senses (God and His kingdom of power and provision) and things that are future, are yet to come. Jesus addressed both kinds of unseen things in His teaching in Matt 6.
 - b. Not only did He remind His listeners of their unseen Father and His provision, He reminded them that there is life after this life. Note Matt 6:25—Don't worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food, drink, and clothes. Doesn't life consist of more than food and clothing (NLT)?
3. Jesus repeatedly stated while He was on earth that there's more to life than just this life. Therefore, He said, keep your priorities right. Recognize that eternal things are more important than temporal things.
 - a. Luke 12:16-21—Jesus told a parable about a man whose farm produced abundant crops to the point where his barns overflowed. So he built bigger barns and told himself: Now I have enough to last for years to come. Then he died suddenly and left it all behind.
 1. This man had more food and clothes than he knew what to do with. But it meant nothing when he left this world. We came into this world with nothing and we leave with nothing. I Tim 6:7
 2. Jesus concluded: A person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God (NLT). A relationship with God is the only thing you take with you when you die.
 - b. Matt 16:26—What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul? Soul means your real life. Real life is life with God forever—in this life and the life to come. Everyone lives forever. The question is: Where? With God or separated from Him?
 1. This life is not unimportant. But we are only passing through this life as it is. Perspective puts this life into proper relationship with the life to come. Eternal things matter most. The most important thing for every person is relationship with Almighty God.
 2. According to Jesus, if that is your perspective and your priority, then you'll have what you need to live this life and the life to come. Matt 6:33--Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs, and he will give you all you need from day to day if you live for him and make the Kingdom of God your primary concern (v33, NLT).
4. Hold that thought for a moment and let's examine something that Paul wrote. (Remember, he was personally taught by Jesus Himself, Gal 1:11-12). We've referred to this statement made by Paul several times in our current series: This world in its present form is passing away (I Cor 7:31, NIV).
 - a. Let's get the context of Paul's words because it gives us insight into tonight's discussion. Paul wrote these words to Christians living in the Greek city of Corinth, in part to answer questions they had about issues related to marriage (lessons for another day). I Cor 7:1-40
 - b. In was in his statements about marriage issues that Paul said this present world coming to an end: I Cor 7:29-31—Now let me say this, dear brothers and sisters: The time that remains is very short,

so husbands should not let marriage be their major concern. Happiness or sadness or wealth should not keep anyone from doing God's work. Those is frequent contact with the things of this world should make good use of them without becoming attached to them (NLT).

1. This can't mean don't put effort into being a good husband or wife because, in other epistles, Paul gave clear instructions on how spouses should treat each other. Eph 5:22-28; Col 3:19
 2. It's a question of perspective and priorities. A happy marriage matters but there's something bigger than that. God's plan for a family on this earth with whom He can live is unfolding, and Jesus is coming back to complete the plan.
 - A. Married or unmarried, we must learn to live with the awareness that this life is temporary and we are only passing through this world as it is. I Pet 1:17; I Pet 2:11; Heb 11:13
 - B. We must recognize that what matters most is that people come to saving knowledge of Jesus so that they can have a life after this life.
5. Note that Paul made reference to doing the work of God. There's more in his statement than we can address in this lesson. But for now, consider these points.
- a. We think of doing the work of God as serving in the church or being in ministry. But that's a very limited understanding. Whatever it means to do the work of God, it must be something that all human beings can do no matter when or where they were born.
 1. Here's what Jesus said about doing the work of God: This is the work of God—that you believe on Me (John 6:28-29). He also said: Let your light shine before men so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven (Matt 5:16).
 2. The most important thing we can do once we believe on Jesus is shine the light of the Lord in our little corner of the world. Matt 5:16
 - b. It's estimated that there were as many as 60 million slaves within the Roman Empire. Note what Paul said to slaves. Col 3:22-24—Obey your earthly masters in everything you do. Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. Obey them willingly because of your reverent fear of the Lord. Work hard and cheerfully at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward (NLT).
 1. How can a slave do the Lord's work? What is the Lord's work? Believe on Jesus and shine your light in your little corner of the world. Will there be any slave owners in Heaven who were converted through the light they saw in one of their slaves?
 2. We won't find out until we get there, but note this point. In one of his epistles, Paul mentioned that there were Christians in Caesar's household (Phil 4:22). It's likely that some of them were slaves. They were lights to their masters in a dark place.
 3. A slave can have the right priorities (the most important thing is that people come to saving knowledge of Jesus) and the right perspective (I work for the Lord and He will give me my inheritance—forever life with Him on this earth made new). A slave with these priorities and this perspective would be able to view his hardships as momentary and light—just like Paul.
 - c. I realize that a lesson like this brings up questions specific to each individual. You may wonder: What does it look like for me to seek first the kingdom? I can't tell you what this will look like in your life because our lives are different, and we all have different circumstances and personalities.
 1. However, regular Bible reading will help you get your perspective and priorities right. And it will give you guidance on how you should live in this world—I am but a foreigner here on earth; I need the guidance of your commands (Ps 119:19, NLT).
 2. The Bible not only gives general instructions applicable to all about how we're supposed to live, if you need direction in an area specific to you, Bible reading will help. The same voice that inspired the Scriptures (the Holy Spirit) is the one who leads and guides us in the specifics.

If you aren't familiar with the Bible then you won't be able to recognize His voice.

3. Prov 6:21-23—Wherever you walk, their counsel (God's Laws, His written Word) can lead you. When you sleep, they will protect you. When you wake up in the morning, they will advise you. For these commands and this teaching are a lamp to light the way ahead of you (NLT).
 - d. Consider something Paul wrote to Timothy to teach to others: Spend your time and energy in training yourselves for spiritual fitness. Physical exercise has some value, but spiritual exercise is much more important for it promises a reward both in this life and the life to come (I Tim 4:8, NLT).
 1. Paul wasn't saying that we should not exercise our body. His point is recognize what is most important, what is eternal, what will outlast this life.
 2. The Greek word that is translated spiritual exercise comes from two words that mean well reverent. To be reverent means to show devotion and honor to someone. Devotion to God (doing His will His way) is profitable in this life and the life to come.
 3. How do you exercise spiritually? Paul just referred to Timothy as "one who is fed by the message of faith and the true teaching you have followed" (I Tim 4:6, NLT). In II Tim 3:14 Paul told Timothy to continue in the Scriptures. Regular Bible reading is spiritual exercise.
 6. It isn't so much what you do; it's why you do what you do. It's your mindset and your priorities. You live with the awareness that there is life after this life and eternal things are more important than temporary (temporal) things. This perspective influences priorities which then influences behavior.
 - a. Phil 3:20—But we are citizens of Heaven. Our outlook goes beyond this world to the hopeful expectation of the Savior who will come from Heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ (J. B. Phillips).
 - b. Col 3:1-4—Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the reality of heaven...Let heaven fill your thoughts. Do not think only about things down here on earth... And when Christ, who is your real life, is revealed to the whole world (at His second coming) you will share in all his glory (NLT).
 1. Heaven is the place where God dwells. Heaven is a one word reference to the life after this life, first in the present invisible heaven and then when Heaven comes to earth. When the world is restored Heaven and earth will be one and the same.
 2. Thinking about Heaven doesn't mean imagining clouds and harps in your mind. It means anticipating what is ahead and living with the awareness that eternal things matter most.
 3. For a more detailed discussion of what awaits us in the life after this life read my book: *The Best Is Yet To Come; What The Bible Says About Heaven*.
- C. Conclusion: Modern western culture emphasizes fulfilling our destiny. But the focus is on what you accomplish in this life. That's not the language of the New Testament and it leads to a skewed perspective and misplaced priorities.
1. Regular reading of the New Testament will help you see that your true destiny will outlast this life. Your true destiny is your eternal destiny—sonship and relationship with God in His forever home, this world renewed and restored.
 2. An eternal perspective takes into account the unseen realities of God and His invisible kingdom of power and provision, as well as the coming visible kingdom of God on earth. This perspective affects our priorities because it enables us to recognize what is most important. If your perspective and priorities are right, your behavior will be right.
 3. Regular reading will help you develop an eternal perspective and set godly priorities. We have much more to talk about next week!