

HOW THINGS REALLY ARE

- A. Introduction: People struggle with reading and understanding the Bible because they don't read it properly. The Bible is a collection of books and each book is meant to be read from start to finish.
1. Therefore, I'm encouraging you to become a regular systematic reader of the New Testament. In this type of reading, you read each book all the way through from start to finish as quickly as you can.
 - a. Regular repeated reading helps you become familiar with the New Testament, which leads to greater understanding of content. This type of reading also helps you see the context of individual verses.
 - b. The Bible is a supernatural book because it is a book from God. Every word is God breathed or inspired by God. It produces growth and change in those who read it. II Tim 3:16; I Thess 2:13
 - c. Regular reading changes your perspective or the way you see things. Perspective is the ability to see or think of things in their true relation to each other. It's not what you see, it's how you see what you see that makes or breaks you in this life.
 1. The Bible gives you an eternal perspective by helping you realize that there is more to life than just this life and that the greater and better part of our existence is ahead of us. Everything you see is temporary and subject to change by God's power either in this life or the life to come.
 2. An eternal perspective doesn't take away the pain of life's hardships and loss, but it gives you hope in the midst of it which lightens the load of life. II Cor 4:17-18
 2. In the past few lessons we've emphasized the fact that there is no such thing as a problem free, pain free life in this fallen world (John 16:33; Matt 6:19). You can do everything right and things still go wrong. We've made two key points:
 - a. God is not behind the hardships of life. Life's troubles are here because of sin. When Adam chose independence from God through sin his choice affected the race resident in him and the earth itself.
 1. Human nature was altered and a curse of corruption and death affected the entire planet. Gen 2:17; Gen 3:17-18; Rom 5:12; Rom 5:19; etc.
 2. (For a complete discussion of the questions raised by these statements read my book *God Is Good And Good Means Good*).
 - b. The Bible records many examples of real people who got real help from God in really difficult situations. These accounts show us how God uses the harsh realities of life in a sin cursed, fallen world and causes them to serve His ultimate purposes for good.
 1. They encourage us because we can see how their stories end, and we find that everything turned out right for God's people—some in this life and some in the life to come. Job 42:10-13
 2. In these accounts we see that God sometimes puts off short term blessing for long term eternal results. We find that God is able to bring genuine good out of real evil. And, we see that He gets His people through until He gets them out. Gen 37-50
 - c. The Bible takes into account unseen facts that can directly affect your life. The Bible helps you see things the way God sees them—the way they really are according to Him.
 1. This is the way things really are according to the Bible. God is with you and for you. And God with you is a very present help in times of trouble. Ps 46:1; Ps 42:5; Ps 139:7-10; etc.
 2. The Lord is all knowing and all powerful. Nothing takes Him by surprise, nothing is too big for Him, and there is nothing for which He does not have a solution. There's no such thing as a hopeless situation for those who know the Lord. We serve the God of hope. Rom 15:13
 3. We all have a natural desire to know why things happen and how God is involved. What is God doing? Is He responsible for this? Is He trying to teach me something or give me direction?
 - a. Those are reasonable questions. But you must be able to answer them according to the Word God.
 - b. You must be able to see or assess your situation according to the Bible. In other words your perspective or view of reality must be accurate. That's our topic tonight—how things really are.

- B. One of the big mistakes we make as we navigate through life is that we try to answer these questions by looking at our circumstances. But God doesn't communicate to or direct us with circumstances.
1. Since God doesn't speak to us through circumstance, you can't figure out what He is doing by looking at your situation. Consider these points.
 - a. Christians are commanded to live and walk by faith. The Bible contrasts faith and sight—For we guide our lives by faith, and not by what we see (II Cor 5:7, 20th Cent). Why would God speak to you through a source He has commanded you not to use as a guide for your life (what you can see)? Faith believes without seeing, and faith comes from the Word of God (Rom 10:17).
 - b. The number one way God speaks to and directs us is through His written Word, the Bible.
 1. Ps 119:105—Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path (NLT); Ps 139:12—Even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you (Ps 139:12, ESV).
 2. Prov 6:21-23—Keep (My Law, My Words) always in your heart...wherever you walk, their counsel 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).
 2. Note these examples in Scripture where people tried to assess their circumstances by looking only at what they could see and, as a result, drew wrong conclusions about their situation.
 - a. Acts 28:1-6—Paul and a number of others were shipwrecked on the island of Melita (Malta). The islanders kindled a fire for the survivors, and as Paul gathered a bundle of sticks to add to the fire, he was bitten by a poisonous snake.
 1. Based on what the islanders could see, they concluded that Paul was a murderer who, although he escaped justice by surviving the shipwreck, was now going to get his due from the snake.
 2. But when Paul shook the snake off with no harm done to him, the onlookers changed their minds and decided that Paul must be a god. Trying to figure out why this happened by looking at circumstances led them to two very different conclusions—and both were wrong.
 - b. Joshua 9:3-26—When Joshua led Israel into the land of Canaan to conquer and settle, the Lord commanded them not to make treaties with any tribes in the region (lessons for another day).
 1. One tribe, the Gibeonites, used deception to gain a peace treaty with Israel. Although they lived nearby, they sent ambassadors to Joshua disguised to look as though they had come from far away. Their sandals were worn, their clothes ragged, and their bread moldy. v4-6
 2. Israel's leaders accepted what they saw and heard (we've come from a distant land) and entered into a treaty with the Gibeonites—just what God told them not to do.
 3. Israel assessed the situation based on sight instead of seeking God's Word: So the Israelite leaders examined their bread, but they did not consult the Lord (v14, NLT).
 3. You can't assess your situation only in terms of what you see and feel in the moment because your senses don't have all the facts in any circumstance. Only God has all the facts. The Bible is our only fully reliable source of information about God and how He works in our lives.
- C. We have a lot of non-biblical ideas about why things happen and what God is doing. These inaccuracies undermine our confidence in God and add to our fear and confusion in the midst of a hard circumstance.
1. It's not unusual to hear people say that everything happens for a reason—meaning that God is somehow behind or approving of what is happening to you.
 - a. But Jesus said that some things happen by chance. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus talked about a man who was attacked by robbers as he travelled on a dangerous road. Luke 10:30-37
 1. Two religious leaders passed the wounded man and left him. One man, a Samaritan, stopped

- to help (lessons for another day).
2. Note one point. Jesus said that a priest came along the road by chance. The word translated chance means accident or coincidence: Luke 10:31—Now by coincidence a certain priest was going down along that road (Amp)
 - A. Coincidence refers to two things that happen at the same time by accident, unintentionally, or unexpectedly (*Webster's Dictionary*). In a fallen world both good and bad happen randomly. Random means by accident or haphazardly, without plan, purpose, or pattern.
 - B. (For a detailed discussion of how this relates to God's sovereignty, read my book *Why Did This Happen? What Is God Doing?*).
 - b. Before my brother became a Christian he worked as a courier. He had no interest in the things of God and lived a sinful lifestyle. One day at a family holiday dinner we (our parents, other sibling, and spouses) were talking, and my brother related an experience he had at work.
 1. My brother was given a package to deliver that had to arrive by a specific time. In route he had a flat tire with no spare on board. But he was right by a tire repair shop and was able to roll onto their lot. The workers were able to help him immediately. His tire was quickly replaced, he was on his way, and the package was delivered on time.
 2. That was an eye opening moment for me. It dawned on me that if he were a Christian, he would have assumed that the Lord orchestrated the entire event. But it wasn't the Lord. My brother didn't believe in the Lord. It was simply the chance and randomness of life in a fallen world. Sometimes things work out and sometimes they don't.
 2. Some wrongly believe that God expresses His will for us through our circumstances. They believe that if you try to do something and are unable, then it must not be the Lord's will. In other words, He guides us by open and closed doors. But, not according to the Bible.
 - a. Consider one example. When Paul was jailed in Rome a believer from the city of Ephesus named Onesiphorus, sought Paul out diligently, found him, and was a great blessing to him. II Tim 1:16-17.
 1. However, when Onesiphorus went to look for Paul, the apostle was not in the first place that he looked. Onesiphorus put forth great effort to find Paul. II Tim 1:17—When he came to Rome, he searched everywhere until he found me (NLT).
 2. There's no hint of the man assessing his situation according to closed or open doors—I guess the Lord doesn't want me to find Paul because he's not here. Onesiphorus was determined to find Paul and kept looking until he found him.
 - b. The New Testament does use the term open door. But open door never mean direction or personal guidance for your life. Open door means an opportunity for proclaiming the gospel.
 1. Acts 14:27—Paul and Barnabus had a successful ministry (open door) to the Gentiles; I Cor 16:9—Paul had great opportunity for ministry (open door) at Ephesus.
 2. II Cor 2:12—A preaching opportunity (open door) opened up in the city of Troas; Col 4:3—Paul asked for prayer that opportunities to preach Jesus would open up (open doors).
 3. This is a subject for another time. But consider one thought. God does lead and guide us, but He does it by His Spirit in line with His written Word, not by good or bad circumstances. John 16:13; John 17:17
 - a. The Bible is filled with promises from God that He will guide you. Ps 32:8—The Lord says, I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you (NLT). Ps 73:24—You will keep on guiding me with your counsel, leading me to a glorious destiny (NLT).
 - b. We struggle with this because we try to figure out how He's going to guide us. But, that's God's problem. Your responsibility is to believe that He will keep His Word to you.
 1. Instead of begging Him for guidance or trying to figure out what He wants you to do by looking at your circumstances, begin to agree with Him: Thank you Lord that you are leading me and guiding me. Thank you for your guidance and your counsel. You can't agree with Him if you

don't know what He has promised—and if you aren't a Bible reader then you don't know.

2. We struggle with trying to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit because we aren't familiar with His voice. You get to know His voice through the written Word because the Holy Spirit is the One who inspired the Scriptures. It's the same voice.

- D. Consider the crucifixion of Jesus. It's a tremendous example of how trying to figure out what God is doing by looking at the circumstances is impossible. It is also a tremendous example of how God uses human choice and causes it to serve His purposes for a family as He brings genuine good out of genuine bad.
1. Remember the big picture or the overall plan of God. The Lord created human beings to become His sons and daughters through faith in Christ and made the earth to be a home for Himself and His family. Both the family and the family home have been damaged by sin. Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:18; Rom 5:12; etc.
 - a. Jesus came to earth two thousand years ago to pay the price for sin so that all who put faith in Him can be transformed into sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ. John 1:12-13
 - b. Jesus will come again (in the not too distant future) to cleanse this planet of corruption and death and restore it to a fit forever home for God and His family. This earth will be renewed and transformed into what the Bible calls the new earth. Isa 65:17; Rev 21-22; etc.
 2. The Bible tells us that wicked men who were inspired by Satan crucified the Lord. Luke 22:3; Acts 2:23
 - a. If you were standing at Golgotha observing the crucifixion, it looked hopeless. Jesus' first followers thought He was the promised Messiah, the Savior. Yet, according to what they could see, all was lost. Evil was triumphing. The Lord was dead.
 - b. But that's not the only thing going on. God was about to beat the devil at his own game. Almighty God is all knowing or omniscient. He knows everything, past present and future.
 1. He knew the devil would attempt to destroy the Redeemer through the Cross, so He worked it into His plan for a family of holy, righteous sons and daughters.
 - A. Through His blood, Jesus fully satisfied Divine Justice on our behalf and opened the way for all who put faith in Him to become sons and daughters of God. II Cor 5:21
 - B. Jesus became the ultimate sacrifice for sin, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev 13:8); He paid for you with the precious lifeblood of Christ, the sinless spotless Lamb of God. God chose him for this purpose long before the world began (I Pet 1:19, NLT).
 2. I Cor 2:7-8—The wisdom we speak of is the secret wisdom of God, which was hidden in former times, though he made it for our benefit before the world began. But the rulers of this world (Eph 6:12) have not understood it; if they had, they would never have crucified our glorious Lord (NLT).
 - c. Almighty God used wicked choices made by sinful, Satan inspired men and worked them into His plan for a family. He produced eternal results and brought tremendous good to multitudes.
 1. Eph 1:11—We were also chosen to belong to him. God decided to choose us long ago in keeping with his plan. He works out everything to fit his plan and purpose (NIrV).
 2. God's plan is clearly stated just a few verses before Eph 1:11—Long ago, even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave him great pleasure (Eph 1:4-5, NLT).
- E. Conclusion: How does God see your circumstance? It's not bigger than Him and He can bring genuine good out of real evil as He furthers His plan for a family. When you learn to see your situation as God sees it, although this perspective doesn't take away pain and loss, it gives you hope in the midst of it. There is restoration and reunion, some in this life and some in the life to come. And God will get you through until He gets you out. That's how things really are according to the Bible! Please read! Much more next week!