

## GOD'S WORD HELPS US SEE REALITY

- A. Introduction: Listen to several lines from one of David's psalms. This psalm extols the virtues of God's Word: The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The decrees of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The commandments of the Lord are right, bringing joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are clear, giving insight to life (Ps 19:7-8, NLT).
1. God has given us His law (His commandments) in the pages of the Bible. According to Psalm 19 God's Word will revive us, bring joy to us, and give us insight into how to navigate through this difficult life.
    - a. In order to get maximum benefit from the Bible you must read it. People struggle with reading the Bible reading and as a result, don't get from it what God intends them to have. To that end, I've given you a simple and effective way to approach the Bible through regular systematic reading.
    - b. Focus on the New Testament, and read each book all the way through from start to finish as quickly as you can. Do this over and over until you become familiar with the New Testament. Understanding comes with familiarity and familiarity comes with regular repeated reading.
  2. To further encourage you to read the Bible, I've been discussing the tangible benefits of reading God's Word. One of the main things the Bible will do for you is change your perspective or your view of reality, which then affects how you deal with life. We've made these points thus far.
    - a. The Bible gives us an eternal perspective by helping us see that there's more to life than just this life. Everything we see is temporary and subject to change by God's power, now or in the life to come.
      1. The Bible helps us see the big picture. God created human beings to become His family through faith in Christ, and He made the earth to be a home for Himself and His family. Both the family and the family home have been damaged by sin.
      2. God is presently working out His plan to restore both the family and the family home to what He always intended, through Jesus and the salvation He provided at the Cross. Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:18; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; Rev 13:8; I Pet 1:20; Acts 3:21; etc.
    - b. The Bible reveals that there is no such thing as a trouble free life in this world. But it assures us that God is not the source of life's hardships. He is our help in time of trouble. John 16:33, Ps 46:1
      1. The Bible helps us answer the why and what questions we all face. Why did this bad thing happen?—because that's life in a sin cursed earth. What is God doing?—He is at work, causing the circumstances of life in a fallen world to serve His ultimate purpose for a family.
      2. God works things for good as He produces temporal and eternal results. He brings maximum glory to Himself and maximum good to as many people as possible. Rom 8:28; Eph 1:11
    - c. When you learn to assess your situation with an eternal perspective, in terms of the big picture, this perspective lightens the load of life in a sin cursed earth. II Corinthians 4:17-18
  3. Tonight, we're going to continue our discussion by taking a further look at the importance of learning to put what God says in His written Word above every other source of information.
- B. In the last several lessons we have made reference to information in the Old Testament. Even though I am encouraging you to read the New Testament, the Old Testament is also the Word of God. (We start our Bible reading with the New because the Old is easier to understand once you are competent in the New.)
1. The Old Testament is primarily the history of the people group through whom Jesus came into this world (the Jews, Hebrews, or Israelites). Within the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament we find historical records of real people who got real help from God in really difficult situations.
    - a. Rom 15:4—These accounts were written to teach subsequent generations (like us) and to give us hope and encouragement as we walk through this difficult life.
    - b. These accounts show us how God is able to use the harsh realities of life in a fallen world to further His purposes for good as He gathers His family for eternity—the life after this life.

2. We've made reference to the story of Joseph, son of Jacob, who was the grandson of Abraham, the first of the Israelites. Joseph's account is a tremendous example of how God works in the midst of difficult circumstances to bring glory to Himself and good to as many people as possible. Gen 37-50
  - a. Let's briefly review. Jacob had twelve sons who eventually became the heads of twelve tribes that grew into the nation of Israel. Joseph was Jacob's second youngest son and his father's favorite.
    1. His older brothers were jealous of him and sold him into slavery when he was seventeen. They told their father that Joseph was killed by a wild animal. Jacob was inconsolable with grief.
    2. Things got worse for Joseph before they got better. In Egypt he was falsely accused of rape and wrongly imprisoned. But through a series of events, he ultimately he ended up second in command in Egypt in charge of a food storage and distribution program that provided food for multitudes during a time of severe famine in that part of the world (the Middle East).
  - b. God did not cause Joseph's troubles. Wicked men, influenced by Satan, made sinful choices that affected Joseph. But God, Who is all knowing, knew the choices they would make—along with all the resulting consequences—and worked them into His ultimate plan. He preserved the line that Jesus came through and multitudes of idol worshippers heard about Him—the True God.
3. Let's go back to Jacob (Gen 42). Twenty years have passed since he lost Joseph. Famine has also hit the land of Canaan (modern day Israel). Jacob sent ten of his sons (the older brothers who sold Joseph to slave traders) to Egypt to get food. Benjamin, the youngest brother, remained in Canaan.
  - a. Joseph immediately recognized his brothers, but they didn't know him. He didn't reveal himself to them. Instead he put them through some tests to see if their characters had changed. Joseph gave them the food they requested, but detained Simeon (second oldest) and told the others that to secure Simeon's freedom and get more food, they must bring Benjamin to Egypt.
  - b. When the brothers returned to their father and told him the situation, his response was: Everything is against me. Joseph is gone, now Simeon is gone and you want to take Benjamin. Gen 42:36
    1. According to sight, emotions, and reason Jacob was correct. But there was more going on than what he could see and conclude from what he could see and feel.
    2. God was at work. Joseph was not dead. Jacob was about to be reunited with him. He wouldn't lose Simeon or Benjamin. He and the family would be invited to Egypt as honored guests where they would ride out the famine with full provision.
  - c. God helped Jacob even though he had no confidence in God's help at that moment. But think about the peace of mind the man could have had if he had been persuaded that God was at work on behalf of him and his family—which He was! Remember, this account is recorded in part to help us.
    1. People want the Bible to tell them how to solve of their immediate crisis. But there's no such thing as a problem free life in this sin damaged world. We've made this point in other lessons. Some mountains you can move and some you can avoid. But others, you must tunnel through or learn to live with. Regular Bible reading helps you identify which is which.
    2. But God's Word will teach you how to have victory and live with peace of mind in the midst of any circumstance that comes your way (even those you can't change) because it changes your perspective. It shows you how to look at your situation in terms of what God says.
4. In every circumstance there is always more information available than what you can see. Not only are there seen things, there are unseen things. Col 1:16
  - a. There is a dimension that is beyond the perception of our physical senses. God, who is Invisible, presides over an unseen kingdom of power and provision that can and does affect the physical world. Not seen doesn't mean not real. It simply means that we can't perceive it with our senses.
    1. God, who is omniscient or all-knowing, is the only one who knows everything about everything—past, present, and future. And He has given us a book that helps us see the unseen. This information is found in the Bible.

2. Jesus said: Thy word O God is truth (John 17:17. KJV). The Greek word that is translated truth means the reality lying at the basis of an appearance (*Vine's Dictionary of New Testament Words*). The Bible shows us the way things really are and not just how they look right now.
  - b. When you learn to live life with the awareness that there is more to you circumstance than what you see in the moment, it lights the load. When you realize that God is at work behind the scenes, causing what your circumstances to serve His ultimate purposes—and that He will get you through until He gets you out—it gives you hope even in hopeless situations.
- C. Part of the challenge we face in the hard times is that what we see is real. And, what we see stimulates real emotions and real thoughts. Our natural tendency is to let sight and emotions dominate us and lead to speculation about the future—just like Jacob did when his sons returned home.
1. We must get to the point where we put what God says above every other source of information. We don't deny what we see and feel. We recognize there's more to our situation than sight and feelings.
    - a. Luke 5:1-7—Consider how Peter responded to Jesus' words to him. There's more in this incident than we can address now, but note a few points in connection with our discussion.
      1. Early in Jesus' public ministry, as He was beginning the process of calling His first disciples (future apostles) to Himself, He encountered several fishermen (including Simon Peter) who were washing their nets on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. They had worked through the night, but caught nothing.
      2. Jesus used their boat to preach from and when finished, He told the men to move to deeper waters and put their nets in the water again. Peter responded: At your word, we'll do it. v5
        - A. Peter had to override sight, emotion, and reason. The men were tired, frustrated, and possibly worried about how they'd make up their lost income. As professional fishermen, they knew that if there are no fish in the area at night, there will be none in the day.
        - B. Yet Peter heard something in Jesus' words that motivated him to ignore all that information and believe the Word of the Lord.
    - b. We face these same battles with sight and emotions and what we can reason based on what we see and feel. But we must learn to put what God says above everything else. You don't deny what you see and feel. You recognize that you don't have all the facts in your situation—but God does.
    - c. Regular repeated reading of the New Testament helps us do this because the Bible is a supernatural book. The Bible affects and changes those who read it. The Bible produces a confidence or assurance in us that God can be trusted to keep His Word. That's what faith is—believing that God will do what He has promised to do. I Thess 2:13; Matt 4:4; Rom 10:17; etc.
  2. Let's consider a spectacular example of how God's Word affects people. In this example we see that regular repeated exposure to God's Word produced confidence or faith in Abraham (father of the Jews) that enabled him to remain unmoved by the challenges from sight and emotions.
    - a. Gen 15:4-7—When Abraham and his wife Sarah were too old to have children, God promised them a son. (His wife was barren when they were young). God kept His Word and a number of years later they did have a son, Isaac (Gen 21:1-2).
    - b. Gen 15:1—Note how it unfolded. The Word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision. This is the first place in the Bible where the word "word" appears. Notice that the Word spoke to Abraham.
      1. Jesus is the Word of God made flesh (John 1:1; John 1:14). Jesus was very interactive with His people before He took on a human nature in the womb of the Virgin Mary.
      2. The implication in this Genesis passage is clear. The Word (Preincarnate Jesus) spoke to Abraham. You may recall that in a confrontation with the Pharisees, Jesus said: Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad (John 8:56, NIV).
    - c. When we read Abraham's entire story we find that Preincarnate Jesus appeared to Abraham a

number of times after this appearance (Gen 17:1-5; Gen 18:1-33; Gen 22:1-19). Jesus, the Living Word of God, gave Abraham hope in a hopeless situation and inspired his faith to the point where Abraham's faith didn't waver in the face of sight and emotions.

1. Rom 4:18-19—Against all odds, when it looked hopeless, Abraham believed the promise and expected God to fulfill it. He took God at his word. In spite of being nearly one hundred years old when the promise of having a son was made, his faith was so strong that it could not be undermined by the fact that he and Sarah were incapable of conceiving a child (TPT).
  2. One translation says: He faced the fact that his body was as good as dead...and that Sarah's womb was also dead (Rom 4:19, NIV). Abraham didn't deny what he could see. He recognized that there were more facts involved in his situation—the promise of Almighty God. Faith perceives as real fact what is not revealed to the senses (Heb 11:1, Amp).
  3. We can learn many lessons from Abraham's story. But here's the point for our present series about the importance of reading the Bible. God works in our lives by His grace through our faith. When we believe what He says He brings it to pass in our lives (many lessons for another day).
    - a. The Greek word that is translated faith means persuasion. It comes from a word that means to convince by argument. God's Word produces faith in humans us by convincing and persuading us of the reality of things we cannot see yet. Rom 10:17
    - b. The Bible persuades us by showing or revealing God to us—His power, faithfulness, goodness, and love. Becoming persuaded of these things to the point where God's Word overrides sight and emotions is often a process.
      1. When we read Abraham's entire story we see that it took time for his faith to reach the point where he wasn't moved by what he could see and feel. It took time to become fully persuaded.
      2. The apostle Paul also reported that he went through a process of persuasion: For I have come through a process of persuasion to the settled conclusion that (nothing) will be able to separate us (me) from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:38-39, Wuest).
    - c. Abraham was persuaded as Jesus repeatedly gave him His Word. Paul was also persuaded through repeated instruction from Jesus, the Word made flesh (Gal 1:11-12). We are persuaded through regular Bible reading.
- D. Conclusion: For the last few weeks we've been emphasizing the importance of your perspective. It's not what you see. It's how you see what you see. Hope and peace of mind come from learning to see things the way they really are according to Almighty God through His written Word.
1. II Cor 4:17-18—We've made a number of references to Paul's ability to call his many difficulties light and momentary. He did this by looking at what he could not see.
    - a. The only way you can see what you can't see is through the written Word of God. Let Almighty God tell you the way things really are. Let Him make you wise and give you insight through His Word. Ps 19:7-8
    - b. God knows what needs to change in the way you see things—even if you don't. His Word will work in you and change you as you read it regularly.
  2. Just as Jesus built confidence (persuasion, faith) into Abraham and Paul through His words to them, Jesus wants to persuade us of unseen realities through the Bible.
    - a. Jesus said that the Scriptures testify of Him (John 5:39). The Living Word, the Lord Jesus, reveals Himself to us through the written Word.
    - b. As we repeatedly read the New Testament we become persuaded of things we cannot see yet to the point where we are no longer moved by what we see and feel in the moment.
  3. We must learn to put what God says in His Word above everything else. Regular systematic reading helps us do this. It takes time and it takes effort, but it's well worth it. Lots more next week!