

that we must read accurately, so that we hear God rightly. Or else we need the help of reliable guides, which, sadly, are not in great supply. Readable authors and Bible study guides are notoriously inaccurate; academic works are more commonly accurate, but notoriously unreadable. So there is little to be done beyond learning the skills of accurate interpretation and relevant application for yourself.

What can you do – what will you do – to develop skills in accurately understanding and applying Scripture?

Day Five: James 1:22,25

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.... The man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

Of course, the goal of all Bible reading is not simply to understand Scripture; that is just the means to an end. The end is to obey God. Partly this is a decision of the will: determining to follow him, rather than self or culture. Partly it is a matter of paying attention, of living out what is learned each week, perhaps even each day.

What Scripture have you read this week that you are applying to your life as you go through the week?

Day Six: Deut 6:6-9

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.

Scripture meditation is an important instrument in life change. Scripture memorization – or at least flash cards and frequent review – is a useful means toward that end. Consider memorizing at least one text regarding each of the core values in this sermon series.

What text will you carry in either mind or pocket to guide your life this week?

Core Value #2 Who Sets Our Agenda?

We like to believe that we are independent-minded, that in all important decisions, we identify options, weigh their merits, and make an informed, self-directed decision.

We deceive ourselves. A fundamental proposition of sociology is that “reality is socially-constructed.” Of course, the point is overstated. But certainly, reality is “socially-conditioned.” That is, we believe what we believe, and we think it reasonable to do what we do, because we have been subtly directed this way by our social world, our friends, mass media, and so forth.

So the question is not, “Will we – our thoughts, identity, emotions, and actions – be shaped by outside forces?” But, “Which outside forces will we permit to shape us?” In Romans 12:1, Paul urges, “Do not conform to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

God reveals himself in Scripture, intending that his Word transform not only the way we think, but also the way we feel, what we do, and who we are.

The danger, though, is that superficial reading, inattentive interpretation, and careless application deceive us into thinking that Scripture is shaping us, when it is actually us – and our culture – shaping Scripture.

Witness, for example, the frequency with which Old Testament prophets condemned their contemporaries for reading what they wanted out of the word of God, rather than hearing what God was actually saying.

Similarly today, a great deal of what passes for preaching, Bible study, or devotional literature amounts to little more than reading American cultural values – or personal preferences – into Scripture.

God has given us his Word, that we might not talk to ourselves through the Bible, but hear him addressing us clearly in it.

Becoming Bible-Directed

Day One: How God speaks

*All Scripture is **God-breathed** and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Tim 3:16-17*

In English, we speak of Scripture being ‘inspired’; Scripture itself claims to be ‘expired’, the words that God breathed-out.

Today, a great many people want to hear from God. Consider, for example, the New York Times bestseller trilogy entitled, *Conversations with God*: God purportedly speaks through Neale Donald Walsch’s inner voice, and millions buy his books. Even many Christians long for God to speak to them directly, while paying scant attention to the venue through which he speaks most clearly and definitively: Scripture.

What place does Scripture hold in your walk with God? How regularly do you read the Bible? Study it?

Day Two: Where God speaks

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Tim 3:16-17

The New Testament gets most play in Christian devotion. To some extent, this is understandable: the New Testament, after all, is version 2.0, and provides far more extensive and clearer reflection on Christ than the Old.

Nonetheless, the only biblical text that Paul had in mind when he wrote 2 Timothy 3:16-17 was the full range of the Old Testament. The Old lays the foundation for the New, and it is hard either to understand or to appreciate the New Testament solution without understanding the elaboration of the problem throughout the Old Testament.

What part of Scripture gets most attention in your walk with God?

Day Three: The tone God uses

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for **teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness**, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Tim 3:16-17*

Scripture offers soft words and hard words, words of forgiveness and mercy, as well as warnings of wrath and judgment. We do God no honor – and ourselves no favor – if we pick and choose whatever we prefer, and disregard the rest.

Consider, for example, the Bible study guide on Jesus’ parables which selects six parables of forgiveness and grace, and omits all his parables warning of judgment. It makes for more appealing, self-congratulatory reading, but with such filters in play, it is not God whom we are hearing, but the echo of our own narcissism. God’s words of rebuke and correction are no less inspired than his words of mercy and grace.

What was a recent word of reassurance that spoke to you in Scripture? A recent word of rebuke?

Day Four: Is it really God speaking?

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. 2 Pet 1:20-21

An extraordinary irony pervades much contemporary Bible reading: the biblical authors could not say just anything, but only what God told them; yet modern readers infer lessons from the biblical text willy-nilly, with little regard for what the biblical authors actually meant.

This is why authorial intent matters so much: because it is God speaking, and we dare not – and we wish not – to distort his voice. He is the living, revealing God; he is not a dummy, nor are we his ventriloquists.

God speaks to us through his words to the ancients. This means