

Good and Bad Habits - Reading the Bible

Sermon transcript

As followers of Jesus, we are taught that reading the Bible is important. But, what difference does reading the Bible make?

Before the meeting, give notes to members of the congregation and ask them to read them out when you ask this question.

God's word encourages us. <i>I weep with sorrow; encourage me by your word. Ps 119:28</i>	God's word gives us understanding and wisdom. <i>Give me understanding and I will obey your instructions; I will put them into practice with all my heart. Ps 119:34</i>
God's word brings us happiness. <i>Make me walk along the path of your commands, for that is where my happiness is found. Ps 119:35</i>	God's word gives us renewed life <i>I long to obey your commandments! Renew my life with your goodness. Ps 119:40</i>
God's word brings us hope. <i>Do not snatch your word of truth from me, for your regulations are my only hope. Ps 119: 43</i>	God's word gives us freedom. <i>I will walk in freedom, for I have devoted myself to your commandments. Ps 119: 45</i>
God's word brings us comfort. <i>Your promise revives me; it comforts me in all my troubles. Ps 119:50</i>	God's word gives us direction. <i>Your word is a lamp to guide my feet. Ps 119:105</i>

God's word, the Bible, is a gift. It allows us to connect with God. It helps us to understand God's wisdom, purpose and direction for our lives.

It's important for us to read the Bible regularly. Today we are going to look at some more healthy habits we can develop for reading the Bible.

1. Read and remember

I wonder how good you are at remembering things?

I'm going to show you an image with ten objects. You can look at the image for 5 seconds then I want you to write down or draw pictures of the ten things.

How many did you remember?

OR

I wonder if you have studied for an exam, gone into the exam and realised that you have forgotten everything you read? Maybe you have a shopping list, set of instructions or recipe then forgotten it before you have put it to use.

GOOD HABITS



Psalms 119:13-16 says,

¹¹ I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

¹³ I have recited aloud all the regulations you have given us.

¹⁶ I will delight in your decrees and not forget your word.

Even when we are in the habit of reading God's word, we must also develop a habit of remembering it.

I wonder if you can recite a Scripture verse from memory? *Allow a few people to recite Scripture verses.* Can you recite another one? How many verses could you recite from memory?

If someone asked you what the Bible says about love, what would you say?
If someone asked you what the Bible says about forgiveness, would you know?

"... you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. ⁷ Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. ⁸ Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. ⁹ Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:6-9)

We need to develop a habit of reading and REMEMBERING God's word.

Practical suggestions

- ☐ Read the same passage of Scripture every day for a week.
- ☐ Repeat a key verse until you have memorised it.
- ☐ Write a verse on a post-it note and put it somewhere you will see and read it regularly.

2. Read and reflect

Before the meeting, ask someone in your congregation, that speaks a language other than English, to teach someone else a short phrase in that language (for example, 'understanding is important'). They must not tell them what the phrase means. Ask the person who has memorised the phrase to stand and call out the phrase.

Now that you have remembered the phrase, can you please tell us what it means? *Ask the person who speaks the language to explain.*

Have you ever read something in the Bible that you didn't understand? What did you do? When we reflect on, or study Scripture, it can help us to gain understanding.

*¹⁵ I will study your commandments
and reflect on your ways.*

*¹⁸ Open my eyes to see
the wonderful truths in your instructions.*

*²⁷ Help me understand the meaning of your commandments,
and I will meditate on your wonderful deeds.*

*⁹⁷ Oh, how I love your instructions!
I think about them all day long.*

GOOD HABITS



*¹³⁰ The teaching of your word gives light,
so even the simple can understand.
Psalm 119: 15, 18, 27, 97, 130*

The first step in understanding the Bible is asking God to help us. We should read prayerfully.
(Max Lucado)

When we read God's Word, it may be helpful to find a quiet space. Take time to pray, asking God to help you to understand as you reflect on the verses you will read. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring you wisdom and direction (John 14:26; John 16:13).

Reflecting on and studying the Bible may also involve taking practical steps to learn more. As you read, take time to think about what the verses mean. Think about the context in which it was written. Look at the surrounding verses. Try using a commentary or Study Bible, read the verses in several different translations or discuss the verses with others. There are many ways that we can increase our understanding of God's Word.

Practical suggestions

We can gain understanding about Scripture by

- ☐ Reflecting and asking the Holy Spirit to give us understanding.
- ☐ Discussion with other Christians.
- ☐ Using notes in a Study Bible, commentary, or other reference book.
- ☐ Listening to sermons and podcasts

3. Read and apply

Once we have read, remembered and reflected on God's word, we also need to apply it to our lives.

Have you ever been sick or injured? It's likely that you visited a doctor and asked for their help. When you received their advice, what did you do? Most of us, would put that advice into practice. We would take the medicine, or the test, or the treatment. We would discover, then put into practice, whatever will improve our health.

But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. ²³ For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. ²⁴ You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. ²⁵ But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it. (James 1:22-25)

James reminds us to allow God's Word to impact our lives. Can you think of something important that you have learnt from reading or hearing Scripture? What difference did it make to how you lived? How did it change your behaviour, relationships, or reactions? What difference might someone else have noticed in you?

We need to develop the habit of remembering God's word, reflecting on it until we have understood it then applying it to our lives.

GOOD HABITS



Practical suggestions

- ☐ After reading or hearing Scripture, ask the question, "what difference will this make to how I live?"
- ☐ Keep a journal noting the changes you will make based on Scripture.
- ☐ Revisit your journal regularly to check your progress.
- ☐ Ask someone else to help keep you accountable for a change in your behaviour or attitude.

What are some habits that you would like to develop for reading the Bible?

*¹ Joyful are people of integrity,
who follow the instructions of the Lord.*

*⁵ Oh, that my actions would consistently
reflect your decrees!*

*⁶ Then I will not be ashamed
when I compare my life with your commands.*

*⁷ As I learn your righteous regulations,
I will thank you by living as I should!*

*⁸ I will obey your decrees.
Please don't give up on me!*

*¹²⁹ Your laws are wonderful.
No wonder I obey them!*

*¹⁴⁴ Your laws are always right;
help me to understand them so I may live.*

(Psalm 119:1, 5-8, 129, 144)