

The Heart of Reading the Bible

If you are a committed Christian, you have more than likely experienced a time when you admit to yourself and others, “I’m not reading the Bible enough.”

- The rhythm of life that flows with vitality, as a result of spiritual renovation, is below the surface of these kinds of questions.
- Reading the Bible well lies in the deep regions of the heart.
- The eternal word of the living God is like a fresh stream that is always there.
- King David said blessed is the man who delights in the word of God (Ps 1:2). The blessed heart is like “a tree planted beside streams of water.”
- Jesus told the unbelieving woman at the well in John eight, that he has water which she knew nothing about. He is in fact the source of the living water.
- “Whoever believes in me...out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (Jn 7:38). Right belief in Jesus is intimately connected to his words.
- But your practice of reading the Bible will not last, will not edify, if your heart is not addressed first. “What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough...” (Isa 1:11).



The Motivations of Your Heart

- Proverbs 4:23 says, “Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life.”
- “Our spiritual condition can facilitate or severely restrict the impact of God’s Word on our lives.”¹ The condition of your heart will impact your ability to hear and act on God’s word, but as a Christian, you have been given a way to understand what’s going on at the level of your heart.
- Your motivations point to what you value the most. And whether you believe it or not, what is most valuable in all the world is in fact the word of God.

A Guided Motivation

- “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119:105).
- The Bible sanctifies our hearts so that we live in God’s presence and make decisions that mature us. Maturity is not free from the harmful world we live in, but Scripture sanctifies the self to endure even the most harmful of circumstances.
- Are you someone who has ears to hear? (Mark 4:9; cf. 1 Ki 19:12) Is your heart hard soil or fertile soil? (Lk 8:5ff) Are you willing to sit under the piercing sword of God’s word (Rev 1:16). Are you willing to endure the corrective scrutiny of the thoughts and intentions of your heart? (Heb 4:12; cf. 2 Tim 3:16).

¹ George Guthrie, *A Short Guide to Reading the Bible Better* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2022), 17.

- The *Parable of the Sower* makes it very clear, if anything, that a cultivated heart will flourish. This takes effort.
- Are you a reader who just wants to figure it out for yourself? Or do you want to walk in guided wisdom? The condition of your heart is the really the key toward understanding God's word.

Address the Condition of Your Heart

- Do you have a hospitality toward the word of God? A good host prepares their house and sets the table for their guests. If you fail to address the condition of your heart as Christian then you will not be prepared to invite Christ to the table of your heart so that he may dine (teach) with you.

Begin with Prayer

- *Acknowledge your need.* "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life..." (Jn. 6:68).
- *Have contrition.* The contrite heart is a repentant heart. We ask the Lord to see if there is any sin in us (Ps 139:23-24). We repent of what we know (Ps 51:3) and of those sins we are not aware of (Ps 19:12; Lk 12:47-48). Of what you know, clearly define the sin and that is it ultimately against God. Do not be defensive, but appeal to God's mercy, ask God to break you, and heal you and comfort you in the Spirit. Resolve to obey.
- *Ask for insight.* Let us not be lacking sense (Prov 9:16-17; Prov 12:11) which leads to ruin, but call out for understanding, clarity and illumination (Prov 2:3-5; Ps 119:144; Rm 12:2).

Reflection Question: What needs to change so that you are reading the Bible for relationship?

Read Relationally

- As you read the word of God, you are to read it relationally. Your study about God recognizes that you read in the presence of God. "...we will never read well if we merely approach the Bible as a body of literature to be mastered, instead of an invitation of spend time with the Master."²
- Moses ascended the mountain to approach God, we are told the following, "Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Ex 33:11). This is the paradigmatic reality of the goal God desires to have with (plans for) all his people.
- 2 Cor 3:15-18. For us who believe in Christ, the veil is lifted. It is face-to-face. As you read, you read in his presence beholding his glory through the word, and this understanding conforms you toward the end to see him face to face.
- 1 Jn. 3:2. We are reading in Christ's presence that we may behold the radiant face of Christ in the very letter of the text. Christ is spiritually preparing us for the fulness of that glory when we will see him as he is. "...and his servants will worship him. They will see his face..." (Rev 22:3-4). Now, this is the reader's vision: beholding the Spiritual presence of Christ. But then we will see him in full glory as we remain with him, see him, and speak with him face-to-face.

² Guthrie, 40.