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The Scriptures were not given to increase our knowledge but to change our lives. —D. L. Moody

Let’s suppose that one day you receive a letter from a friend. You open it with eager anticipation only to discover a confusing jumble of words: “Uzza wuzza jazza wazza! Surfuss murfuss calorex flex.” With a perplexed frown, you think, *Hmmm, what could this mean? A joke, perhaps? Maybe it’s a secret code or some other language.* Unless someone interprets it for you, though, you are at a loss.

That’s how a lot of people feel about the Bible. They see it as a confusing combination of stuffy old stories, ancient history, and irrelevant rules. “What do all those prophets, poets, and pundits have to do with me and my life today? Their world seems so—distant.” They may concede that the Bible contains some noble...
principles—but written in archaic language that is difficult to understand. They approach the Bible like some cryptic code that needs to be broken or deciphered. Sound familiar? Some people believe they can’t understand the Bible without an expert to explain its mysterious truths. They think they must go to a Bible school or seminary to really understand its message. Hogwash!

Of course we need to understand what the Bible says, or else it will be of little value to us, but God has taken our frailties into consideration and has given us His Word in such a way that our minds can understand its truths and our souls can be nourished by it. God wants us to read the Bible. He didn’t intend for it to collect dust on a coffee table or lie dormant inside a desk drawer. It is a means of getting to know Him. He also wants us to understand it. It was never God’s intention that the Bible become something we recite, read, chant, or sing without a thorough comprehension of its truth.

Of the many radical changes that accompany spiritual conversion, perhaps none is more significant than the shift in our attitude toward the Bible. I have experienced this personally and witnessed it in others. When a person comes into a relationship with the living God, he or she notices a hunger to know more and experience more. Who is this God? What is He like? What does He want me to do? Questions like these drive us to the Bible for answers. What a surprise, when our spiritual eyes are opened, to find that God’s Word is an inexhaustible treasure chest of truth and wisdom. Better yet, it’s even possible to enjoy studying the Bible. Has that been your experience yet?
Perhaps you’ve found that even though this joy of discovery is readily available to all sincere seekers, it isn’t automatic. Despite the basic simplicity of the Bible’s message, it isn’t always easy to understand the original context of ancient Hebrew or Greek culture. On the other hand, God gave us the Bible to reveal Himself to us, and we don’t have to be scholars of ancient history to enjoy a rich, rewarding, and meaningful study of the Scriptures. That’s why I’ve written this book—to whet your appetite for studying the Bible and to give you some tools to help you properly approach a consistent study of God’s Word.

Not long after I became a Christian, I went back to the church in which I’d been raised. Although it was considered a Christian denomination, Bible reading was never emphasized. As I entered the front door, Bible in hand, and made my way through the foyer, people looked at me as if I were some sort of extraterrestrial being. “Why are you bringing in one of those things?” someone asked. I thought, What am I supposed to carry? A coloring book? It dawned on me that of all the places that should welcome and foster a study of the Bible, it would be a church!

Certainly the Bible should be prominent in our churches. It is our Magna Carta, our Declaration of Independence. It is our owner’s manual and our road map to life. I agree with what George Mueller, founder of the Bristol Orphanage in London during the 1800s, said about the importance of God’s Word:

The vigor of our spiritual life will be in exact proportion to the place held by the Bible in our life and thoughts. I
solemnly state this from the experience of fifty-four years. The first three years after conversion I neglected the Word of God. Since I began to search it diligently, the blessing has been wonderful. Great has been the blessing from consecutive, diligent, daily study. I look upon it as a lost day when I have not had a good time over the Word of God.

In these chapters, I will introduce some very basic concepts that will help you feel at home just about anywhere in the Bible. You don’t have to be afraid of any passage of Scripture. After all, when Jesus was still on earth, He promised His followers that He would send the Holy Spirit to teach them all things and guide them into all truth (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit is the ultimate Author of all Scripture and He is also our best interpreter. Not only did He orchestrate the composition and preservation of God’s Word, He also reveals its deepest truths within our hearts. As Christians, every time we open the Bible, we can rely on the Holy Spirit to illumine the text.

IT’S ALL GREEK TO ME!

Further evidence that God intends for the Bible to be accessible to everyone is the simplicity of the language in which it was given. Greek was the most universal language at the time of the New Testament. The style in which it was written is also noteworthy. In those days, two types of Greek were spoken: a classical, refined style unique to scholars; and a simpler style, known as koine or common Greek, which prevailed in the Greek-speaking world
from the time of Alexander the Great until about A.D. 500. This “marketplace Greek,” which the average citizen could understand, was the language used by the writers of the New Testament.

That’s not to suggest that all of Scripture is simplistic and easy to understand. Certainly there are difficult and controversial parts, and some verses are hard to interpret without a thorough understanding of the Bible as a whole. At times we may feel as if we are wading through a deep river. After all, we’re dealing with God’s infinite truth—it’s not lightweight stuff! The apostle Paul even says that for now we only “know in part,” but someday we’ll see the full picture of truth (1 Corinthians 13:9-10). Until then, I am content to be “on hold” about some of the more difficult-to-understand issues.

I like what the great evangelist Dwight L. Moody said about the challenge of understanding the Bible:

I am glad there’s a depth in the Bible I know nothing about, for it shows its divine authorship. A man once came to me with a very difficult passage and said, “Mr. Moody, how do you explain that?”

I replied, “I don’t.”

“But how do you interpret it?”

“I don’t interpret it.”

“Well, how do you understand it?”

“I don’t understand it.”

“What do you do with it?”

“I believe it! I believe many things I don’t understand.”
Because much of God’s truth transcends us, we must be content to believe some things we don’t fully understand. Nature itself is filled with wonders we cannot fathom, so how can we expect to know everything spiritual? In John 3, Jesus reminds Nicodemus that if he is unable to grasp earthly things, heavenly things would be far beyond him (John 3:12). Still, God has spoken so that we can understand. He delights to reveal His truth and enlighten our hearts and minds. He loves for His children to understand His ways. As Moses said, “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 29:29).

In studying the Bible, don’t get hung up on everything you don’t understand. Instead, be content to study the Scriptures in faith, and leave the rest to God. My friend and mentor Chuck Smith once gave me some unforgettable advice: “Never give up what you do know for sure for what you don’t know for sure.” Great wisdom! Hold on to what you know for certain—those things that God has revealed to you in His Word. For everything else, create a little mental file titled “Waiting for Further Information” and allow God to continue to teach you. As you study, your knowledge and understanding will grow—and the “pending” file may grow as well.

**DOES GOD USE HUMAN TEACHERS?**

Because the Holy Spirit is ultimately the best Bible teacher, and because He resides inside every believer to direct us into God’s truth, the question may arise, do we even need human teachers? I’ll let the apostle Paul answer that:
And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. (EPHESIANS 4:11-12)

Here’s how it works: Among the many spiritual gifts that God distributes across the body of Christ, He gives the gifts of pastoring and teaching to some to help the church understand the meaning of the Scriptures. These teaching pastors are individuals used by God to equip and prepare God’s people for works of service. We don’t want to rely on our teachers to the detriment or exclusion of our own careful study, but there’s nothing wrong with learning from others whom God has especially gifted and who have studied the original languages, history, and cultures of the Bible.

If we’re not careful, though, we can become conditioned to being spoon-fed the Scriptures. After all, it’s great to sit and listen to a well-versed Bible teacher and just soak it in—right? The teacher does all the work, and we do all the sitting and soaking. However, the most rewarding truths are those we discover on our own as the Holy Spirit sheds light on the Word. When we uncover truth by our own study, our convictions deepen and take root more readily than if those truths were merely handed to us. A truly gifted teacher will not only strengthen us spiritually but also whet our appetite for personal study.

The perfect balance between the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit and instruction by human teachers was perhaps modeled by the Bereans, a group of Christians that Paul met on one of his
missionary journeys. He was impressed by their openness to instruction and their uncommon diligence in studying the Scriptures on their own. Paul says of the Berean believers, “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11).

Did you notice the balance between receiving truth and searching it out? The Bereans scrutinized Paul’s teaching in light of the Scriptures, and the apostle commended their actions. As a preacher myself, I advise you to listen readily to your pastor, but always check to see if his words align with what God has said in the Bible. As you become a student of the Scriptures, you will see an acceleration in your spiritual growth and you will experience the incomparable ministry of the Holy Spirit as He speaks to you directly and personally.

Perhaps you’ve had the same experience I’ve had. Maybe you’ve read a passage of Scripture several times without any particular insight. Then you read it again—only this time, it’s like a light goes on and your understanding is clearer than ever before. Now when you refer to that Scripture, you have some genuine insight and wisdom. What happened? The Holy Spirit simply did what Jesus promised He would do—He led you into all truth.

**REGULAR FEASTING ON THE WORD**

One of healthiest habits you can develop is to read through the entire Bible on a regular basis. Before you dismiss the idea as too difficult, let me put it in perspective. It’s not as formidable a task
as you might think. At a very moderate rate, the entire Bible can be read in about seventy hours—about fifty-two hours for the Old Testament and eighteen hours for the New Testament. Divided over an entire year, those seventy hours equate to one hour and twenty minutes per week, or sixteen minutes per day if you were to read five days a week—or only eleven-and-a-half minutes per day if you establish the habit of reading your Bible every day. Not as time-consuming as you’d think, is it? Compare that with the time you spend on other activities. For most of us, our primary occupation consumes at least forty hours a week. Week in and week out, that’s about two thousand hours annually. Each year we sleep almost three thousand hours. Add another five hundred and fifty hours per year for eating, and about fifteen hundred hours per year for watching television, and suddenly those seventy hours of Bible reading look pretty easy. Perspective is everything!

Let’s take a look at some tools that can launch you into a regular, satisfying—yes, even *enjoyable*—practice of Bible reading and study.