

CHAPTER TWO

02


Studying and reading the Bible is essential to knowing God better. There is no shortcut to understanding its meaning and therefore studying it diligently is essential. But we should also read the Bible devotionally, as a lover of the Lord revealed in Scripture, in such a way that we encounter him. Coming to the Bible this way means we come with open hearts—that we aren't just students of the Word, but that we desire to come "face to face with the living God."





“...where we walk with the God who is surprising, dangerous, mysterious, alongside us though we fail to recognize Him, then disappearing the minute we do.”

- Mark Buchannan, *The Holy Wild*



"You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me..."-John 5:39

A young teacher stands in the synagogue to read from the Isaiah scroll.

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Lk 4:18-19).

Stopping there, he returns the scroll to the attendant and sits down.

It is one of those moments when all the attention in the world seems fixed on the words to be spoken next. Does this rabbi know when the Messiah will appear? Is the time of deliverance from the Roman oppressors at hand? Is this the year of the Lord's favor? Why didn't this rabbi read the portion about the "day of vengeance"?

Then he speaks.

"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Jesus directs their attention to himself. He talks of revelation through Scripture: all prophets, like Elijah, are rejected by their own. The stories are there, pointing to him—to the salvation he offers—but not all will receive him. *They would rather throw him off a cliff.*



The Scriptures are, of course, the most essential and reliable way God reveals himself to us today. This is not to rule out God's voice speaking to us through supernatural ways, such as by angels, during prayer, and by the gifts of the Spirit, etc. But the Bible provides revelation that leads us to salvation, shows us how to live godly lives, and remains the standard by which to measure the other Spirit-led revelations that we may receive. The apostle Paul confirmed this when he described all Scripture as inspired by God and profitable for godly living (2 Tim. 3:16).

Studying and reading the Bible is, therefore, essential to knowing God better. There is no shortcut to understanding its meaning and, therefore, studying it diligently is essential. But we should also read the Bible devotionally, as a lover of the Lord who is revealed in Scripture. We should read it in such a way that we encounter him. Coming to the Bible this way means we come with open hearts—that we aren't just students of the Word, but that we desire to come "face to face with the living God."

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If you read the Bible quickly, it will benefit you only a little. Instead, as the devotional writer Madame Guyon wrote, "Plunge into the very depths of the words you read until revelation, like a sweet aroma, breaks out upon you." Pause as you read to allow the scriptures to gently turn your mind away from distractions and onto Christ. Read scriptures purposely, forming a prayer from your heart. As you draw near to him, he draws near to you, so that you may be nourished by the bread of his word and transformed by his presence.



Along these lines, we can open the revelations of Scripture by personalizing its promises. For instance, the first chapter of Ephesians contains several well-known promises we can appropriate, and which are themselves directed toward revelationship:

"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe" —Eph 1:17-19a).

I (Cathy), often declare these verses over my children at night while they sleep, substituting the pronouns with their names. As we ask God to reveal these promises to us personally, revelationship is deepened.

As a mother, I'm also facilitating a budding revelationship between my own children and Christ. Recently, my three-and-a-half-year-old daughter—who has sung herself to sleep for all of her life and never struggled to fall asleep—suddenly became afraid of going to sleep in her room. She had a nightlight, and she had no reason to be afraid, but the first night she got up 15 times. The second night, 20. The third night, we realized we had to equip her to face her fears. We did so by having her declare over herself one of the many scriptures she's memorized: "Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9). The next night, through her hysterics, she called out to God, "I am strong and courageous!" and "God is with me!" and "God help me!" And he did. She fell asleep right after the worst of the struggle. In the morning, she told me that she saw Jesus and several angels. She said Jesus was so big he filled her room and that his angels were outside the windows blocking them with their wings. These fears did not return.



Scripture is “sharp as a surgeon’s scalpel” (Hebrews 4:12) to put it in the paraphrased words of Eugene Peterson in his Message Bible. But has the Bible become dull and blunted to us? Unfortunately, for many Christians today, the Bible is just one book among many others on the bedside table.

Even those who read it more frequently often use the same translation so many times that their minds wander as they read it. The “transporting or horrifying realities of which the book tells may come to us blunted and disarmed and we may only sigh with tranquil veneration when we ought to be burning with shame or struck dumb with terror or carried out of ourselves by ravishing hopes and adoration’s” to quote C. S. Lewis. “The real sanctity, the real beauty and sublimity of the New Testament (as of Christ’s life) are of a different sort: miles deeper and *further in*.”

The Bible wasn’t dull and boring on the road to Emmaus when the disciple’s hearts “burned within them” while Christ explained the Scriptures (Luke 24:25-27, 30-32). When was the last time our hearts “burned” within us as we read the Bible? When was the last time we came to the Bible to be changed? When was the last time we encountered the Christ of Scripture as a lover?

We should, of course, come to the Scriptures as a student, as a disciple to learn at the master’s feet. But sometimes we should come to wash His feet with our tears. In deep conviction and repentance—in mourning for our sins—we are captivated by his love that reached for us while we were still sinners.

Revelation is courtship, too.

Have you experienced the Passionate Shepherd as he woos you with his love, offering himself as your provider and lover, inviting you to prove his faithfulness?



It “becomes holy ground on which we meet with God and consummate our love for him. It is wonderful, mysterious and beautiful,” as Chris Webb put it, “just like its wonderful, mysterious and beautiful Inspirer.”

Revelation also means using our imagination to place ourselves in that synagogue with that young rabbi, Jesus, listening as he read from the scroll. It means placing ourselves in the boat with Peter and the other disciples as we hear how Jesus commanded them to put out a little from the shore and cast their nets.

Do you sense the reluctance of the professional fishermen to obey the words of a carpenter, just as we are often reluctant to obey his words today? Nevertheless, something in the way the Lord spoke or looked—the author doesn’t tell us—caused them to finally obey. (What way is he looking into our lives and speaking to us? In what area are we reluctant to obey him?)

What a blessing came about by their obedience! Can you see them frantically trying to pull in the overwhelming catch of fish—more than two boatloads? (What blessing does God want to pour into our lives if we obey him?)

That’s when the realization comes over Peter: he is in the presence of the Messiah—for only the Messiah could do such a miracle. A profound sense of shame and conviction strikes him to his core—I am a sinner in the presence of a holy man! He drops his nets and worships at the feet of Jesus.

We, through a sanctified imagination, can put ourselves in Peter’s place in such a way that something of his revelation of Christ becomes part of our relationship with him as well. The authors of the Bible intended for their readers to share the wonders of their relationship with the Lord to deepen our relationship. They have walked before us and have so much to share.



I (Randy) have also been personally enriched by certain expositions of Scripture. Scripture contains many propositions to live by, as well as revelations of the Persons of the Trinity, and we can benefit through the preaching and teaching of these truths. In one case, when I was in Bible school, I ran across an interesting title of a scholarly article in a lexicon. At the time you couldn't find such articles online—that was very limited—so I ordered it by interlibrary loan.

The article arrived after several days and I excitedly tore open the package. To my disappointment, the article assumed readers would know four or five languages. Nevertheless, I persisted through the English parts and managed to get the gist of the meaning. Then, in the summary, it all came together, and I understood what the author was saying. To this day, this diligent study has brought me one of the deepest revelations of Jesus and his supremacy that I have ever read.

When I consider...

We, through a sanctified imagination, can put ourselves in the place of characters in the Bible in such a way that something of their revelation of Christ becomes part of our relationship with him as well. The authors of the Bible intended for their readers to share the wonders of their relationship with the Lord in order to deepen our relationship. They have walked before us and have so much to share.

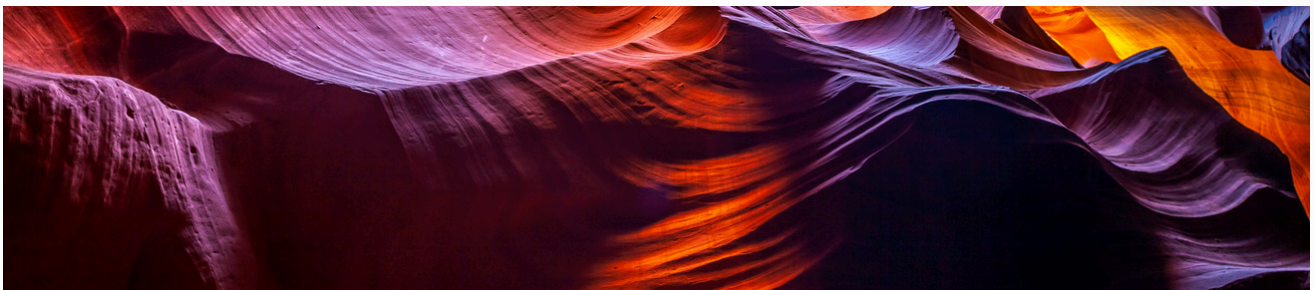
1. Consider a story in the Bible that captivates your imagination.

2. What can you hear, taste, see, and feel with your imagination?

3. Since he is still the same God today, what is the revelation of God in that story and how can it change your relationship with him?

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Christians are in danger of their lampstand being removed because we merely engage in functional prayer and treat Bible reading as a checkmark on a to-do list to earn or prove we deserve approval from God. If reading the Bible and prayer doesn't bring God's presence, press in further and don't give up but make sure you are doing them to bring God's presence.





"You are in danger of substituting prayer and Bible study for living fellowship with God. Fellowship is the living interchange of giving Him your love, your heart, and your life and receiving from God His love, His life, and His spirit." - Andrew Murray, *The Inner Life*

The purpose of prayer is to find God's heart, receive His heart, then pray it on earth. The purpose of reading His words is to allow them to transform our inner being. If they have stopped doing so, we need to return to the things we did at first—when we first were found by God. These things return us to the safety and victory that intimacy with Christ brings.

For Review

Why and how do we judge "Spirit-led revelations" by the Bible?

What does it mean to read the Bible "as a lover"?

How do you apply Bible study truths to your life?

For Review

How do you make room in your life for meditation on specific passages to allow the Holy Spirit to transform you?

What habits can you establish to develop the discipline of meditating on God's Word day and night?

How have you encountered God devotionally through reading the Bible?

Journal

...so you may know him better...

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. - Ephesians 1:17-23

What are the specific prayer requests that Paul asked God to make known to the church in Ephesus?
