

PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY NOURISHES THE HEART II Timothy 2:15

INTRODUCTION:

It seems like every few weeks, the food police are telling us that something is bad for us that they used to tell us was good for us. But wait around a while and they will often reverse-field and decide it wasn't so bad after all.

- When I was a kid, pepper was bad: it caused cancer. Then they decided that, in moderation, it was all right after all. Turns out, you had to eat a dump truck full of pepper every year for it to be bad for you.
- Eggs were bad but now they're good.
- Diet soda was good, then it was bad, then it was OK and now it is bad again.
- Cranberries were supposed to cause cancer but now they are good for us again. (I'm still not going to eat them at Thanksgiving but it's good to know I could if I decided I wanted to.)
- And the list just seems to go on and on.

Fortunately, when it comes to feeding your soul, the rules have never changed: feed on God's Word. You can read it; you can understand it and you can apply it to your life.

It was the French lawyer and politician, Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, who, in 1826 coined the expression, "Tell me what you eat and I will tell you who you are." Perhaps you have heard it phrased, "You are what you eat."

There's a lot of truth in that saying. If you want to have a healthy body, you need to feed it on healthy food. And the same principle applies to our souls: if we want healthy souls, we need to feed them on healthy spiritual food. The healthy soul-food is God's Word.

God's Word will always strengthen, will always nurture, will always nourish.

- I Peter 2:2 tells us, "*Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.*"
- In Job 23, Job's testimony was, "*I have not departed from the commands of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread.*"
- Hebrews 5:12-14 describes the serious teaching of God's Word as the "solid food" on which the mature Christian should be feeding.
- And think of this: when Jesus fasted in the wilderness, the first temptation Satan threw at him was to turn stones into bread to satisfy his physical appetite. Jesus' reply was that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Now if you think that one meal a week, feeding on God's Word, is enough to maintain your spiritual health, you are sadly mistaken. I do the very best I can to bring heart healthy and spiritually nutritious sermons. But if you are only feeding your soul one meal a week, you are malnourished and wasting away. You need to develop the practice and a pattern of personal Bible study.

In II Timothy 2:15, Paul told his young protégé, Timothy, why he should personally study God's Word. These same reasons should also motivate us to personal study of God's Word. The apostle Paul wrote:

¹⁵ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

The familiar King James Version of the Bible, translated in 1611, read:

¹⁵ Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

"Do your best to present yourself to God" as one who correctly handles the word of truth. "Study to show yourself approved unto God" as one who knows how to properly study the Bible. Either way you put it, the reasons to personally study the Bible are the same:

I. SO WE WILL BE APPROVED WHEN WE STAND IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved..." One day we will be called to present ourselves to God for his appraisal. Our eternal destiny will depend on God's evaluation. Everybody else may think you were a really fine woman or a good old boy but nobody else's opinion matters. They don't have a vote. It is only God's judgment that matters. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved.

But, you know, I don't think Paul was thinking about the end of time and the Great White Throne when he told Timothy to do his best to present himself to God as one approved. I can't be too dogmatic about this but I think Paul was advising Timothy about how he should approach God in his daily life.

We present ourselves before God every minute of every day...and every night. We live our lives in the presence of God, whether we are mindful of that or not.

It is incumbent upon us to do the best we can to present ourselves before God as diligent students who know how to accurately investigate, analyze and understand God's Word. The Bible is the very words of the God of heaven and earth. It is a remarkable and humbling thing to note that God

wants to communicate with us. We had better demonstrate that we want to know exactly what He wants us to know.

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

II. SO WE WILL BE ASSURED WHEN WE ENGAGE IN THE WORK OF GOD

We should be involved in systematic and disciplined study of the Bible so we will be approved when we stand in the presence of God and so we will be assured when we engage in the work of God.

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed...

While on this earth, we are to be workers for the Lord. Some people have not seemed to grasp this. They act as if they believe that they give their lives to Jesus and then just sit back and rest on their Blessed Assurance. People, the call to discipleship is not a call to idleness. When we make the decision to follow Jesus, it is a decision to work for him.

Think of the parables and metaphors that Jesus used to describe what discipleship is like.

- He says it is like being a son who has been sent by his father to labor in his vineyard.
- It is like being a servant who has been sent into the harvest field to bring in the crop.
- It is like being a servant who is entrusted with his master's enterprise while the master is on a long journey.
- It is like being a traveler who comes across a foreigner who has fallen among thieves and who then bandages his wounds, takes him to an inn and pays for his care.

On and on it goes. Jesus wanted people to understand that being a Christian would mean working for him.

Paul told Timothy that he must study the Bible so he can present himself to God as one who is approved and as a workman who does not need to be ashamed.

What can lead a worker to be ashamed? Well, I suspect a worker would be ashamed if he doesn't know how to do his job. If I were to manage to land a job as a welder, I would embarrass myself pretty quickly because I don't know how to weld. I've never struck an arc.

A worker for the Lord would be ashamed if he doesn't know how to do what God has called him to do. How can he learn how to do what God wants him to do? Read the Book.

A worker should also be ashamed if he is unreliable. If I were an employer and I had a worker that I couldn't count on to do his job, I'd be dissatisfied with that worker and he ought to be ashamed to see me come around to his worksite. Too many Christians are hit-and-miss in the work of the Lord. They are unreliable in their service for their Master.

A worker should be ashamed if he does shoddy work. I grew up with a song that gave the challenge: "Give of your best to the master." That was ingrained into me at an early age. God demands and deserves our best – not just what's left after we have spent ourselves on ourselves. He demands and He deserves first place in our hearts, in our schedule, in our budget, in our lives. Workers who do not give God their best should be ashamed.

And workers who are lazy should be ashamed...both on the job where they are employed and also in the work of the Lord. *"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed..."*

III. **SO WE WILL BE ACCURATE WHEN WE HANDLE THE WORD OF GOD**

We should be involved in systematic and disciplined study of the Bible so we will be approved when we stand in the presence of God, so we will be assured when we engage in the work of God and so we will be accurate when we handle the Word of God.

The Biblical illiteracy and Biblical ignorance of our age is just astounding. The Barna Research Group has found that, according to their surveys, 69% of Americans report that they exercise 30 minutes or more every day. Barna also reports that only 37% of Americans say they read the Bible regularly and among that 37%, they spend, on average, 52 minutes per week reading the Bible. Think of that! The vast majority of Americans, by their own admission, do not read the Bible regularly. And among the minority who do claim to read their Bibles regularly, they read, on average, less than 7½ minutes per day – as compared with 69% of Americans who say they spend more than 30 minutes a day in physical exercise!

People! This body is not going to live forever. But your soul will. This same apostle Paul, told this same young man, Timothy, *"physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come."* We must get ourselves involved in regular and systematic study of the Bible so we can present ourselves as approved before God, as unashamed workers and as accurate students of His Word.

The old saying is that practice makes perfect and if we want to perfect our skill as students of the Bible, we need to study it regularly.

I want to give you a few very specific and very practical suggestions for studying the Bible.

1. Get a translation you can understand. I know that some people are very partial to the language of the King James Bible. And that's fine if you will actually read it and if you actually understand it. But I must confess that the Elizabethan English is not my native tongue. The King James Bible was translated in 1611 just 8 years after Queen Elizabeth I died. This was the same era as that of William Shakespeare, who died in 1616. I read Shakespeare in high school English classes but I have never read Shakespeare if I didn't have to. It is just too far removed from the language I speak and understand. And I have the same reaction to the King James Bible. If I am going to read the Bible and understand it and enjoy it, I need a more contemporary translation. I preach from the New International Version and I often read from the New Living Translation in my devotional times. If you want me to help you find a good translation of the Bible that you can enjoy, let me know and I'll be glad to loan you some translations that you can evaluate.
2. Set aside a specific time when you will read your Bible. I do not exercise regularly. I want to. I intend to. But I don't plan to; and by that I mean that I do not have a specific plan for when I will exercise. I don't set my alarm early. I don't lay out my sneakers. I don't hold myself accountable to exercise so I don't exercise. If you intend to read your Bible, you have to plan to read your Bible. Set aside a specific time and a specific place. Put your Bible, a pen and a pad of paper in that place and then set your alarm or whatever you need to do to make sure you get started.
3. Talk to others about what you are reading. Back when I did walk every morning, friends knew it. I talked to them about it. I managed to work into regular conversations that I thought of this, that or the other "while I was out walking this morning." That kind of conversation helped to hold me accountable and helped to keep me walking because I knew that people were aware that I'd started walking and I did not want to embarrass myself by having to admit that I had missed a day. The same holds true if you share with others what you've been reading from the Bible. You will retain more of what you have learned if you talk about it and you will remain more faithful in your disciplined Bible reading if you think about the fact that others know you have begun this devotional time.
4. Make a note of any questions or insights that come to you. It may be that, while you are reading, some question will come to you. Write it down and then ask your Sunday School teacher, an elder, a Christian mentor or your minister. We'll all be happy to try to answer your

questions. And we will all be happy to hear any insights that come to you as you read your Bible.

CONCLUSION:

Junk food is the rage of the age. And it is as true with what we feed our hearts as it is with what we feed our stomachs. Billy Graham's daughter, Anne Graham Lotz once said of many Christians, "...*They fill up on 'junk food'—Christian books, CDs, TV programs, seminars, and all sorts of church activities—none of these are bad, really, but they lead to a sickly spiritual state if consumed apart from the true Bread of Life...*" We can do better. And we must. We can and we must actually read and study God's Word. Personal Bible study nourishes the heart.

INVITATION: #413 – *"Break Thou The Bread of Life"*