

Basics of the Christian Life Series

The Book of the Christian Life

By
Andy Davis

At A Glance:

- I. Introduction**
- II. The Need for the Bible**
- III. How the Bible Helps Us Grow Spiritually**
- IV. Conclusion**
- V. Questions for Further Thought**

The Book of the Christian Life

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: Importance of the Bible

1. I hung up the phone in my office at church and paused for a few moments to reflect on what I had just heard. A lady from the community called to ask about the food pantry. Her husband of nineteen years had emptied their bank accounts and left. She was suddenly and unexpectedly, on her own. My heart was pained to hear her story. Yet another example of the devastating effects of humanity's rebellion against God and the unhealthy pursuit of personal happiness apart from God's wisdom.
2. But what bothered me even more than the situation was the perspective of this woman when she said, "I'm spiritual but not religious...I haven't been to church in a long time." The painful and tragic situation was a result of something else, it was a symptom not a source. The source was sin. Studies are showing us that the "spiritual but not religious" and the "nones" group has exploded in increasing numbers.¹ There are many in our community. There is a growing general sense that people just don't care about God or spiritual things. Our country is going the way of Europe. It is a chorus I've heard many times. Combine this growing attitude of the removal of God (secularization) with an abandonment of organized religion (the church) and we are left in a vulnerable and destructive situation. A perfect spiritual storm. We are left to ourselves with little direction. Unfortunately, situations like this are becoming more and more common as people dismiss God and His authority while at the same time they pursue their own desires.
3. I think these trends are closely connected to and inseparable from decreasing confidence in the Bible. Millennials are questioning the authority and accuracy of the Bible at unprecedented rates. Dannielle's view is typical, "I think the Bible has a lot to offer...But I don't think that we can say that it is some kind of magical book that has all truth in it. I have read some parts of it before, but it's really not something I'm super interested in."² This statement, by the way, is being made by a person with a church background. Large numbers of Millennials who grow up in the church, haven't been convinced the Bible is true...and their lives reflect it. A large segment of our culture has lost confidence in both the Bible and the church and are therefore left with figuring life out on their own.

- B. I wonder what the results would be if I was able to ask each person who regularly attends church in our country if they were truly INTERESTED in the Bible. What percentage could honestly answer "yes"? I'm sure most would feel some sense of obligation toward the Bible,

¹ The "nones" refer to the people who don't have a religious affiliation. They would not call themselves Christian, Muslim, Mormon, Jewish, or anything other religious label you want to throw at them. This includes, but is not limited to atheists (those who believe God doesn't exist) and agnostics (those who don't know if God exists).

² Jonathan Morrow *Questioning the Bible: 11 Major Challenges to the Bible's Authority* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, Kindle Edition), 229. This book will increase a person's confidence in the truthfulness of the Bible. I highly recommend it.

perhaps even some guilt, but how many would be genuinely passionate about spending time reading and learning from the Bible. Do we really value the Bible in our hearts? Do we correctly view the Bible for what it is? Even if we do, do we interact and respond to the Bible the way it deserves? Does it exert its appropriate influence over us?

- C. It is impossible for me to overemphasize the importance of the role the Bible plays in Christianity and the Christian life. If you get rid of the Bible you get rid of Christianity itself because you eliminate the record of the person on whom Christianity is founded. The Bible is critical when it comes to spiritual growth. We can't become mature without the Bible. In order for us to interact with the Bible the way God desires, we must be entirely convinced of its truthfulness. If we don't trust it, we won't base our decisions and lifestyles on it. We will think we know better than the advice we find on the Bible's pages. Even Christians are having a hard time putting confidence in the Bible when they constantly hear how anti-science, repressive, morally corrupt, contradictory, outdated, and historically inaccurate the Bible is. If a person believes in the Bible as the Word of God, what seems to naturally follow is the thought that this person is mentally and morally ill. If you have the audacity to take the Bible as "literally true" you will be viewed as foolish and out of touch with reality. It is no wonder that many Christians have also lost confidence in the Bible. We are programmed to view the Bible negatively.
- D. However, I can make a one hundred percent accurate prediction. The results are guaranteed and beyond question. If I had a million dollars, I would bet it all on the following truth. If we choose to live life by doing what we think is best, we will not live the way God wants us to live and will suffer the negative consequences as a result. If the Bible and its divine wisdom is absent from our lives, our lives will be messy and less fulfilling than a life lived in obedience to God. Those who ignore the Bible will miss out on becoming the person they could be with Jesus. They will miss out on the fullness of God being created in them along with all its benefits. There is no way around this reality. If we think we can go through life without the divine wisdom of God contained in the pages of the Bible without any ill effects, we are badly mistaken.
- E. If we are to live the Christian life robustly, we must understand the role the Bible plays in our spiritual development. We must understand our deep need for the Bible and how it affects us. There are a few important passages that I want to share with you that emphasizes our deep need for the Bible.

II. The Need for the Bible

- A. The Bible combined with the activity of the Holy Spirit is the primary means of soul growth. Here is what the apostle Peter says, "² like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, ³ if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord." (1 Pet. 2:2-3). An individual who has an authentic encounter with God and consequently turns their life over to Him, should take the next natural step in their pursuit of God: growth through an intake of the Bible. When a genuine commitment to God happens (called conversion), there will be a realization of a need to change one's current lifestyle habits (1 Pet. 2:1). The Holy Spirit will become part of the person's life and they will feel His conviction about the way they are living. This realization will push them toward the Bible. Peter compares new followers of Christ

to newborn babies. Newborn babies need milk from their mother in order to survive. New followers of Christ need the nourishment of the Bible in order to survive. The Bible nourishes and sustains the spiritual life. This is true not only at the beginning of the Christian life but throughout as well. What do newborn babies do when they realize they need to eat? They cry because they don't know what to do with their hunger, but they know they are hungry. New followers of Christ need to learn how to nourish their souls through the Bible but they will start by relying on a spiritual parent who will feed them when they can't feed themselves.

- B. The Bible will generate spiritual growth in those who belong to God; it is the most central means of development. If a person isn't spending time learning from the Bible, they will be stunted in their growth and will remain immature over time. Remember, soul maturity doesn't happen by itself. If a person isn't actively engaged in expanding their understanding of the Bible, they will remain a spiritual baby. It isn't enough just to put in your time or go through the motions of interacting with the Bible, it must be meaningful interaction (Jas. 1:25). If a person regularly reads the Bible but their mind wanders and they don't pay attention to what they are reading, or they don't think about the implications of what they are reading, their time will be largely wasted. Followers of Christ should be focused and intentional about their contact with the Bible. It may be that we will need to develop the skills necessary to learn from the Bible.³
- C. It should be noted that there are seasons related to interaction with the Bible. There will be times when the words of the Bible jump off the page and there will be times when the Bible seems very dry despite your best effort. These ebbs and flows are normal. One day you may have to read many chapters before you feel something meaningful was noticed. Other times, as soon as you sit down and start reading you are saturated within three verses and barely able to keep up with what the Holy Spirit is showing you. This is the nature of regularly connecting with the Bible. There is value in developing the regular habit of having contact with the Bible even when we don't think we are getting anything out of it. We may need to learn to become more effective in how we approach the Bible, but any contact with the Bible is usually a good thing. However, if we rarely experience times where the Bible impacts us or rarely think about the implications of what we are being exposed to from the Bible, we shouldn't expect substantial growth. I have known Christians who have been in the church for fifty or sixty years, who never learned the basics of learning from the Bible. These Christians, although very experienced with the church, only developed a minimal spiritual maturity over all those years because of a lack of meaningful contact with the Bible; this is a tragedy. We can't assume, just because we, or someone else, has been a Christian for a long time means that we are spiritually mature. Length of church attendance does not equal depth of maturity. Length of interaction with the Bible equals depth of maturity.
- D. John of Damascus, writing in the late seventh early eighth century says, "To search the sacred Scripture is very good and most profitable for the soul. For 'like a tree which is planted near the

³ Some may find the basic SOAP method of Bible study helpful when starting out with the Scriptures. This method is explained at <https://lovegodgreatly.com/how-to-soap/> Accessed 7/29/2019. The main liability with this method however, is that it skips an important step in the Bible study process: interpretation (what does the Bible mean?). The interpretation step is left out, probably due to its complexity, and wanted to keep this method basic. Even with this liability, SOAP can be helpful.

running waters,’ [a quote from Ps. 1:3] so does the soul watered by sacred Scripture also grow heart and bear fruit in due season.”⁴ Although learning from the Bible is valuable, it can be very challenging, especially when first starting out. Keep with it. The good news is that our passion for the Bible grows over time. The more we learn, the more we will want to learn. As we begin to understand the Bible and make different connections, the Bible will become exciting. As we grow in the habit of having contact with the Bible, its message will become precious to us and we will start to delight in it (Jer. 15:16).

III. How the Bible Helps Us Grow Spiritually⁵

- A. The Bible helps us grow, but it is critical to go beyond knowing THAT the Bible helps us grow spiritually to knowing HOW the Bible helps us grow. If we understand the logistics of the spiritual growth provided by the Bible, we will be much more motivated to seek after the growth flowing from the Bible even when the Bible becomes tedious and difficult.
- B. An explanation of how the Bible generates spiritual growth in our lives is found in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, “¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The reason the Bible can do what it does is because it comes from God Himself (2 Pet. 1:20-21). God gave it, reveals Himself in it, and works through it. The Bible is saturated with God, through and through, which makes the Bible efficient in producing results.⁶ The Bible itself doesn’t have any special abilities, the words on the page by themselves will accomplish nothing, but the words on the page empowered by God will make all the difference. From beginning to end, the written message finds its ultimate source in God and the human authors wrote at His command (Ex. 17:14, 34:27, Rev. 1:1-3).
- C. The Bible is the tool used by God to get us ready to do what He desires us to do. It prepares us to obey God by doing every good work that He intends for us. Verse 17 is the goal of all Biblical instruction, it is the purpose toward which verse 16 moves.⁷ The Bible has the power to make this personal change happen and it is useful in bringing about the result of preparedness. In short, we should have full confidence in the Bible to help us grow to become the people God is shaping us to be. The Bible is effective in spiritual growth as it promotes and enhances well-being. The Bible creates genuine human flourishing. Following the Bible will give you your life back, your true life. The Bible will help you break free from the life that has been tarnished, abused, neglected, corrupted, misguided, and destroyed by a God neglecting existence.

⁴ Peter Gorday, ed., [Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon](#), Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 269. John Damascene, [“An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith,”](#) in *St. Hilary of Poitiers, John of Damascus*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. S. D. F. Salmond, vol. 9b, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1899), 89.

⁵ Although written for those who want to disciple or counsel others toward spiritual change, Jay Adams *How To Help People Change: The Four-Step Biblical Process* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) is a great resource for understanding how the Bible changes a person. Every Christian can benefit from reading this book.

⁶ A helpful resource for understanding the basic evidence for why the Bible should be viewed as a divine book instead of merely a human book see Greg Koukl *Ancient Words: Reflections on the Reliability and Proper Use of Scripture* (Signal Hill: Stand to Reason), 2011).

⁷ Donald Guthrie, [Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 14, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 182.

- D. How does the Bible accomplish this? Paul gives us four ways the Bible creates change in our lives over time. First, the Bible is capable of teaching us. The Bible provides us with true information. We are educated, through God’s Word, about spiritual matters, God, and salvation. The Bible is God’s educational program where knowledge and skills are imparted. God actively engages in the activity of teaching through the Bible. Every person has developed wrong views about God, ourselves, and the world we live in because of our independent living apart from God. Our thinking and perspectives need to be corrected. We don’t see things as they really are because sin has deceived us (2 Thess. 2:10, Col. 2:8) resulting in the damage of our thinking processes (Rm. 1:22, Eph. 4:17-18). Even those who knew the Bible better than most still didn’t see things as they should (Jn. 5:39). Jesus said people make mistakes when they don’t understand the Scriptures (Mt. 22:29, Mk. 12:24). When we don’t understand the Bible we don’t perceive reality accurately and we make mistakes in thinking and living. We desperately need to be taught by the Bible to see and understand with clarity and accuracy. God’s perspective communicates truth, and we need to acknowledge the depth of our incorrect thinking when we learn how it contradicts God’s Word.
- E. Second, the Bible points out the aspects of our life that need to change (reproof). God’s Word shows us where we are in the wrong (Rm. 7:7-12). The Word of God convinces us of our errors⁸ to the point that we become convinced of the truthfulness of our fault. Our error could be in the way we think or the way we act. The Bible functions as a marker indicating to us where we are regarding our movement toward sin. The Bible serves as our sin detector. We might not think we’re doing too bad spiritually when the Bible’s truth steps in and reveals our true position. We discover we weren’t doing as well as we thought we were when we compare ourselves to God’s standard. In many cases, we will be surprised and caught off guard with something that never even crossed our mind before. The Bible is the mirror of the Christian life; it helps us see our true reflection—who we really are in the eyes of God.
- F. One example that I ran across recently in my time with the Bible comes from Numbers chapter eleven. The Bible calls a simple desire for eating meat an instance of greed (Num. 11:4) from the perspective of God (wanting something that He hasn’t provided at the present moment). I can relate because I love eating meat. However, when faced with the truth that a small desire for something that we don’t presently have is an instance of greediness: I understand that I am much greedier than I first thought. Each time a person has an attitude or thought of discontentment, they are being greedy. This is what makes complaining so odious to God. We are in essence telling God that He doesn’t know what He’s doing even though He is far smarter than we are. Or we are questioning His character even though He always does what is right. The Bible accurately evaluates our thoughts, motives, desires, intentions, and actions; it is our spiritual mirror (Heb. 4:12). Gary Thomas writes, “Spiritual understanding comes from adopting God’s view of all things.”⁹

⁸ William Barclay, [*The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*](#), 3rd ed. fully rev. and updated., The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 225.

⁹ Gary L. Thomas, [*The Glorious Pursuit: Embracing the Virtues of Christ*](#) (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1998), 128.

- G. Third, the Bible doesn't just point out the areas of our life where we are wrong, it also tells us where we can make improvements (correction). It tells us how to correct what is wrong; how our spiritual and life problems can be fixed. The Bible gives us the counsel of God in replacing the things we are doing wrong. The Word of God tells us what we should be doing in addition to what we should cease doing. The Bible corrects our life so that we move from what we had been doing to what God wants us to do.
- H. A general example of this that has come to my attention again recently is Jesus' statement in John 6:38, ³⁸ "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." Jesus made it His goal to do His Father's will in every situation. This is what God wants of me as well. When I take a quick evaluation of my life, I quickly realize that I don't do this each and every day. One way this happens is when I come home from work. After a long day of work, I would like the freedom to unwind and do what I want to do for a little while. I have the perspective some days that I even deserve some time for myself. Why do I think I have the right to live my life, even a few hours, "for myself"? Haven't I been bought at a price? Aren't I "not my own"? Why do I think I have the freedom to have my independent will be the basis for my decisions and actions? I don't. God is showing me what I need to do to correct my life orientation in every moment of every day. When I come home from work I usually have a decision to make as I'm approached by my kids. They want me to play with them, push them on the swing, or get involved with what they are doing when I get home. This isn't my idea of "relaxing" after work. In that moment I can either live selfishly and choose to do what I want to do or decide to live sacrificially for the best interest of my kids and in that moment do the will of My Father instead of my own will. While I'm spending time with my kids I can also please the Father by looking for opportunities to disciple my kids as I interact with them. This takes intentional concentration and it feels like work for me since that is what my work revolves around. I need to have an attitude of investing in my kids in that moment which is also not typically how I view "relaxing" after work since I can't just kick my shoes off and check out. The Bible reveals to me what I can do to correct the way I'm thinking and living in each moment of the day.
- I. Fourth, the Bible is capable of giving us the diploma of the entire discipleship process (training in righteousness). The Bible helps us reach the point of spiritual maturity: a life conformed to God's standards of what is good and right. The Bible helps us cultivate the mindset of Jesus and the morals of Jesus so the whole process of nurturing an immature Christian is completed. Even though maturity is reached, growth continues to happen but the point here is that the foundational instruction that a disciple needs, as compared to the raising of a child, is completed through the Bible. A person can have the information they need and the ability required to live a godly life in every situation as a result of their interaction with the Bible. The Bible is sufficient to produce God's intended spiritual purposes in the life of everyone. The Bible trains us to think and act in right ways so that we can live godly lives. Biblical instruction is not designed to stay in the classroom but is intended to move out into the real world and put into

practice. This instruction is directed toward Timothy as a servant of God (1 Tim. 6:11).¹⁰ The Bible is capable of producing a person who is perfectly trained for being a pastor and teacher of the people of God. If this is so, certainly the Bible can also prepare disciples in general who never fulfill these more complex roles. The Bible outfits a Christian as completely as the right tool is fitted for a particular task.

- J. What is the goal of parents when it comes to their kids? To raise them in such a way that they can live on their own because the children have all the necessary knowledge and skills needed to live life in a self-sufficient manner. The children are prepared to survive in the real world. The follower of Christ, who has been trained by the Bible will have what they need to live the Christian life on their own. At first, spiritually immature disciples will need other more mature Christians to help them along. They will need to rely on the teaching of others for growth and direction. However, as a person matures in Christ, they become more and more self-sufficient.¹¹ They go to the Bible and have the skills to find the answers they seek without having to ask someone else for help. The Bible is capable of producing spiritual maturity in every person to the point that they know how to live a life that is pleasing to God through their personal connection with the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. They are equipped and ready to do anything God might ask them to do.
- K. No matter how spiritually mature we become, we can always learn from others who are farther along on their journey with Jesus. However, in order to judge whether we have grown out of spiritual childhood or not we can ask ourselves the question, “What is the main source of our spiritual nourishment?” If the main source of our growth comes from other followers of Christ who are more mature than us, we are probably still a spiritual child. However, if our main source of nourishment comes from our own independent connection with God and His Word, we have probably moved from spiritual childhood to spiritual adulthood.

IV. Conclusion

- A. The Bible is absolutely irreplaceable when it comes to soul development, spiritual growth, and spiritual maturity. The depth of our growth will be directly proportional to the amount of contact we have with the Bible. The Word of God is the main tool used by God to bring us to maturity. We desperately need the Bible’s influence in our life if we are to become the person God wants us to be. There is no way around this fact.
- B. The Bible helps us grow by teaching us God’s perspective and the truth about spiritual matters, it shows us where we are in error in our life, it reveals to us how to change our life in order to live in a manner that is pleasing to God, and it produces maturity in us to the point that we are prepared to do everything God wants us to do. We can reach the point of having everything we need to live a life that is pleasing to God through an understanding and application of the Bible.

¹⁰ I. Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner, [*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*](#), International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 790.

¹¹ By self-sufficient I don’t mean “on their own”. Self-sufficiency in the Christian life always involves constant reliance on the Holy Spirit. What I means is that they will be less dependent on other Christians and more dependent on God.

- C. We should be careful not to fool ourselves into thinking we are doing so well with God that we don't need the regular intake of the Bible; that we can survive or grow spiritually with little to no contact with the Scriptures.
- D. We must always foster an awareness of our deep need for the Bible. Those who think they are just fine without the Bible: aren't thinking as they should; they don't have a proper view of the value of the Bible or the work it does in their heart. If you feel spiritually okay while neglecting the Bible, if you don't have contact with the Bible for long periods of time and don't sense any ill effects, and are content to continue in that condition; you will remain spiritually immature at best and miss out on the quality of life that God offers.

V. Questions For Further Thought

- A. Have you been fully convinced that the Bible communicates truth and harmonizes with the way the world actually is? If so, how has this impacted your life?
- B. What questions or doubts do you have about the message of the Bible?
- C. What do you need to be able to base your thinking and living on the principles of the Bible with confidence? What might help you trust the Bible completely?
- D. How often do you sit down with the Bible? How much time do you spend?
- E. Think about and describe how you regularly interact with the Bible. What do you do when you sit down with the Bible?
- F. Share an example of a time when the Bible showed you how to make an improvement to your life.
- G. Would you define yourself as a spiritual child or a spiritual adult? What reasons cause you to think this way?