J.D. Kilmer

SESSION 2 | SCRIPTURE

I. INTRODUCTION

A. A Puritan Prayer, from the Valley of Vision

Longings After God:

"My dear LORD, I can but tell thee that thou knowest I long for nothing but thyself, nothing but holiness, nothing but union with thy will. Thou hast given me these desires, and thou alone canst give me the thing desired. My soul longs for communion with thee, for modification of indwelling corruption, especially spiritual pride. How precious it is to have a tender sense and clear apprehension of the mystery of godliness, of true holiness…Blessed Lord, let me climb up near to thee, and love and long and plead, and wrestle with thee, and pant for deliverance from the body of sin, for my heart is wandering and lifeless, and my soul mourns to think it should ever lose sight of its Beloved. Wrap my life in divine love, and keep me ever desiring thee, always humble and resigned to thy will more fixed on thyself, that I may be more fitted for doing and suffering."

B. Review: What is Spiritual Formation?

"Spiritual formation is the conscious process by which we seek to heighten and satisfy our Spirit-given thirst for God (Ps. 42:1-2) through divinely appointed means and with a view toward 'working out our own salvation with fear and trembling' (Phil. 2:12) and becoming 'mature in Christ' (Col. 1:28). (Matthew Bingham, A Heart Aflame for God, 35)

C. The Puritan's focus: Keep your heart

"Keep your heart with all vigilance for from it flow the springs of life" (Proverbs 4:23)

"If you would thus keep your hearts as hath been persuaded, then furnish your hearts richly with the Word of God, which is their best preservative against sin. Keep the Word, and the Word will keep you…We never lose our hearts till they have first lost the efficacious and powerful impressions of the Word." (John Flavel, pg. 90-91 in Bingham)

II. WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

A. The Bible is God's Word to humanity.

"For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:21)

"Let the man who would hear God speak, read Holy Scripture" (Martin Lurther, Against the Papacy, 1545)

B. The Bible is inspired: it is our supreme authority.

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good word." (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

C. The Bible is inerrant: it is entirely trustworthy.

"The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever." (Psalm 119:160)

"…your word is truth." (John 17:17)

D. The Bible is clear: it is understandable.

"For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4)

"All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to me know, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of the Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them" (Westminster Confession of Faith, in God's Word Alone by Matthew Barrett, pg. 315)

E. The Bible is beautiful: God's glory on display.

The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure,
making wise the simple;
8 the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
9 the fear of the LORD is clean,
enduring forever;
the rules[d] of the LORD are true,
and righteous altogether.
10 More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb. (Psalm 19:7-10)

"My seven decades of experience with the Bible have not been mainly a battle to hold on. They have been a blessing of being held on to, namely, by beauty—that is, by glory. I have stood in front of this window all these years, not to protect it from being broken, or because the owner of the chalet told me to, but because of the glory of the Alps on the other side. I am a captive of the glory of God revealed in Scripture." (John Piper, pg. 11, A Peculiar Glory)

III. WHAT IS THE BIBLE'S ROLE IN SPIRITUAL FORMATION?

A. The Bible is paramount to spiritual formation.

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." (Colossians 3:16)

"I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word…" (2 Timothy 4:1-2)

"…the Bible is not just one tool among many in our spiritual formation tool kit, but rather, whether directly or indirectly, the whole of our spiritual formation flows out from our engagement with it. You read scripture and hear God's voice addressed to you." (Bingham, pg. 92)

B. The Puritan focus on the centrality of the Bible is in stark contrast to the medieval church.

"This elevation of the word represented a tremendous shift from a medieval religious culture in which preaching was often infrequent, occasional, and disconnected front the ordinary rhythms of parish ministry. Every Reformer understood preaching and scripture as the means through which God creates and builds his church, giving men and women new spiritual life and forming Christ in them" (Bingham, pg. 96-97).

"…the aim of the Christian life is to glorify God… 'this thing is chiefly attained by knowledge and practice of God's word.' Scripture is described as 'the light to our paths, the key of the kingdom of heaven, our comfort in affliction, our shield and sword against Saan, the school of all wisdom, the glass wherein we behold God's face, the testimony of his favor, and the only food and nourishment of our souls…Willingly receive the word of God, earnestly study it, and in all your life

practice it, that you may now appear indeed to be the people of God" (The Geneva Bible, in Bingham pg. 100-101)

C. The Bible nourishes our souls.

'It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:4)

"Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart." (Jeremiah 15:16)

D. The Bible strengthens our faith.

"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its seams and its leaf does not wither." (Psalm 1:1-3)

E. The Bible sanctifies us from sin.

"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth." (John 17:17)

"It is most unreasonable to expect to be conformed to the image of God, unless the truth concerning God be made to operate often and continuously upon the mind. How can a heart that is filled with the thoughts and cares of the world, and especially one which is often moved to evil by the thoughts or sight of sin, expect that the affections which answer to the holiness, goodness or greatness of God should gather strength within it?...We cannot make progress in holiness unless we devote much time to the reading, and hearing, and meditating upon the word of God, which is the truth whereby we are sanctified…" (Charles Hodge, in Bingham, pg. 109)

"When we come to the word, we come to commune with the living God, to hear from him, and to be shaped and formed thereby. The Christian life from inception to completion is a Bible-infused life" (Bingham, pg. 126)

IV. HOW DID THE PURITANS READ SCRIPTURE?

"Again and again church leaders wanted to know whether their congregants were reading and wrestling with Scripture, frequently identifying 'contempt of the word' as 'the mother of error and iniquity' and the source of 'the universal coldness and decay of zeal in all estates'" (Bingham, pg. 98)

A. Frequently

"Remember that thy life is but short, and that all this business…is but for the use of this short life; but salvation or damnation is everlasting! Rise up, therefore, every morning by so much time the earlier; defraud thy foggy flesh of so much sleep; but rob not thy soul of her food, nor God of his service; and serve the Almighty duly whilst thou has time and health". (Lewis Bayly in Bingham, pg. 116)

"…think what you would give for an hour, when you shall lie like dead, cold blackened clay" (Samuel Rutherford in Bingham, pg. 117)

B. Actively

"By 'active' here, I mean an approach to Bible reading that is strategic, intentional, and thoughtfully designed to maximize, at least from a human perspective, one's time in God's word." (Bingham, pg 118)

"…One chapter thus read with understanding and meditated upon with application, will better feed and comfort thy soul than five read and run over without marking their scope or sense, or making any use of them to thine ownself" (Lewis Bayly in Bingham, pg. 119)

C. Expectantly

"Why is our Bible reading cold and lifeless? Perhaps we have too low a view of Scripture…It's the view that has taken hold whenever I come to my Bible without a sense of expectation that herein I am meeting with the one who made me and

sustains my every breath…At root, this attitude reflects a tacit antisupernatural approach to Scripture and naturalistic assumption that the book before me is in fact, on like any other." (Bingham, pg. 122-123)

"To provoke a diligent reading of the Word, labor to have a right notion of Scripture…read the Word as a book made by God Himself." (Thomas Watson, in Bingham pg. 123)

"Open my eyes that I may behold wonderful things out of your law?" (Psalm 119:17)

"Give me understanding that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart" (Psalm 119L17)

V. CONCLUSION/APPLICATION

A. What is your reading plan: Time? Place? Passage?
B. What is your strategy for active reading?
C. How will you prepare your heart to read expectantly?

"What benefits come to us by studying the Bible?"

"As we devote ourselves to God's Word, we commune with God himself and are fortified in faith, sanctified from sin, strengthened in weakness, and sustained in suffering" (Sovereign Grace Catechism, Pg. 25)

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