

A THIRD TOOL FOR BUILDING A SPIRITUAL HOUSE

USE A READING PLAN

DON'T LEAVE YOUR MIND AT THE BIBLE'S DOOR!

The teachings of the Bible are there for our comfort. As we have seen, some doctrines appear mysterious. And even though mysterious, they are to be handled lightly, for building Christians up not tearing them down. Biblical principles comfort us and that gives us hope. Election is like that. Balanced properly with man's responsibility, it brings much comfort to know God's love for us is eternal. So why train your children to read the scriptures? So that they might be enabled to balance these principles and, at the same time, experience the comfort that brings hope. Isn't that the kind of peace and well-being we all want for our descendants?

This right attitude toward biblical authority coupled with a sincere love for Christ and His Word can lead to a passionate desire to know what the Bible means. That is if the Holy Spirit comes on us with power! We would expect this passion to lead to the self-discipline needed to stay in the scripture. But the reality is that at times our attitude slides and our love grows cold, resulting in even less self-discipline. And with teens this is even worse. The teen years are precarious times because of the pull of the world and their peers. Having a plan or system for regular reading of the Bible can help here. With your encouragement, they can "just do it whether they feel like it or not. Then the truth can bring comfort and hope to them again.

JUST DO IT!!

Geoffrey Thomas, a Baptist minister from Wales, gives some advice on "just doing it":

Effective Bible Study is largely a matter of good habits of work. Begin with firm determination; begin at once. Never wait until you are in the mood or you may wait for weeks. Get in the mood by starting to read: the Bible creates its own mood. As J. C. Ryle says about it, 'The way to do a thing is to do it.' The way to read the Bible is actually to read it, not wishing and meaning and resolving and intending and thinking about reading the Bible, but actually reading it. You will not advance one step until you have done that.¹

There are many plans available. Work with your teen to find one right for them. The one I've used is *M'Cheyne's Calendar for Daily Reading*. It shows you a way to read through the whole Bible once a year. But for warming your heart in a devotional way, it has you read the Psalms and New Testament twice each year. It provides for two chapters for family reading and two for private.² Each person needs to adjust this to their own schedules and endurance.

BUILD ENDURANCE

One benefit of physical exercise is to build yourself up to a higher level of endurance and strength. Over the years I've walked many miles. And as I have aged I still have the endurance to keep on walking! This spiritual exercise of reading systematically is like that. You have to do it to build yourself up so you will have the endurance to keep at it! If your family can't participate, then read four chapters yourself. If you can't read four chapters a day, then read one. Increase as your strength increases. The key is continuing to be in the Bible with a right attitude. And to read with understanding, not just read words. Find a plan your teen likes and figure out ways to help them stick to it. Geoffrey Thomas gives some good advice:

There are times when nothing goes right and we are subject to unexpected pressures. There are periods of spiritual barrenness and despondency in which our taste for the things of God well-nigh disappears. ... What is important is always to be coming back to the Bible after periods of neglect.³

Having a system has much value. It keeps you in the whole Bible. You don't just haphazardly read or have a favorite section that you keep coming back to without the balance of the rest of scripture. Secondly, it helps you to recognize the wolves and their sly faking of the truth. It equips you to refute false teaching and witness effectively. It helps you recognize the themes flowing through all sixty-six books of the Bible. Instead of familiarity breeding contempt, as the saying goes, familiarity with the words used will bring more understanding of what it says and what it means. But, the great value is in getting to know God and pursuing Him through His Word. When your teen falls away from being in the Word, remind him of these benefits. If he doesn't listen, at least it will encourage you to pick up your own plan and begin again. He needs you to model this in front of him! I started reading the Bible systematically after watching my mother retire to her room early with her Bible and hearing that my great grandmother read the Bible each year for forty years. Telling family stories can be a good thing!

If you will discipline yourself to keep reading the Bible, you will have more and more comfort from its truths, your love for Christ will increase as you get to know Him better, and you will be equipped to encourage others for their own endurance or for their salvation. Even your children and grandchildren! And that could bring revival, a visit from the Holy Spirit to enliven those words and make them real to you and your teen.

But, you must "get up and get going." If you simply "let go and let God" in this matter of self-discipline and duty, then God will hold you accountable. And that goes for modeling and encouraging our children as well. It is another one of those mysteries, after all.

ENCOURAGING TEENS

Discuss these questions when the time is right. Remember it doesn't have to be all the same day! You are encourager here, not a professor!

1. Share what you learned from your successes in self-discipline for Bible

reading, study, or devotional time.

2. Discuss the motivations for reading the Bible. How can you encourage one another in developing all these skills--and keeping at it?.

3. Discuss the following quote (italics mine):

...do not expect always to get an emotional charge or a feeling of quiet peace when you read the Bible. By the grace of God you may expect to be a frequent experience, but often you will get no emotional response at all. Let the Word break over your heart and mind again and again as the years go by, and *imperceptibly there will come great changes in your attitude and outlook and conduct.* You will probably be the last to recognize these. Often you will feel very, very small, because increasingly the God of the Bible will become to you wonderfully great.⁴

READ WITH UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION

How can we read for biblical principles instead of just reading words to finish our "task" for the day? A principle is a foundational truth. It is a broad idea, not a detail. For instance, "Our salvation is entirely brought about by the power and grace of God" is a basic principle. You want to approach the scriptures to discover truths, not to impose your opinion upon them. But, the sermons you hear, other books you read, the experts you consult, your church's statement of faith can all be guides to what principles to be on the lookout for.

Read Psalm 24 together. Look for two basic principles. (Hint: one deals with God; one deals with man. Check your answers at note⁵) How should you apply this?

Read Ephesians 5. Find at least one principle you could apply.

You get the idea, don't you? Reading with understanding and application, not just reading to get through the assigned passage. That's what Pastor Thomas means by letting the scriptures break over your heart and mind again and again.

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