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Sermon Summary

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Spiritual Disciplines. Bible Reading 2

“People need more than bread for their life. They must feed on every word of God.” Dueteronomy 8:3

I wonder if you truly believe this. That we cannot truly live unless we feed on God’s word. That the Bible is as essential as the food we eat or the water we drink. Last week, I encouraged you in the key spiritual habit of reading the Bible. Habit that is very easy to fall out of. We get busy and we just let it go.

“God word generates life, creates faith produces change, frightens the Devil, causes miracles, heals hurts, builds character, transforms circumstances, imparts joy, overcomes adversity, defeats temptation, infuses hope, releases power, cleanse our minds, brings things into being, and guarantees our future forever. “ Quote. Rick Warren

We cannot live without the Word of God.

I have not departed from his commands, but have treasured his words more than daily food. Job 23:12

You have to feed on the Word of God, or else you will spiritually starve. If you don’t feed on the word of god, the culture around you will shape you and mold you. It’s funny that often Christians in the West take for granted the Bible. Yet The bible is banned in 52 countries in the world. Supposedly a bunch of made up stories and yet banned by 52 nations. Over 1 quarter of the world are petrified by this book. It is the most banned book of all time. Why? Because it changes people. Not just a book. Spirit of God infuses the words of God. People risk their lives in these countries to get a bible and read it. Some face death or imprisonment for reading it. Yet we take it for granted. Often have more than one copy. And don’t treasure it.

God speaks to us through his word. One of the Primary ways.

But today I want to look at the practice of reading the Bible. I can encourage you and inspire you to read it. But how do we go about reading it. 1000’s pages. Thick, daunting

Forming a Habit. Part of the challenge to reading the Bible is to make it a habit. It used to be said that it takes 30 days to form a habit. New research has found that to not be right. It is anything from 2 to 8 months. The reason we say 30 days is it makes a manageable target. But the problem is that it is not true. It might, but often it takes longer. That means there will be set backs. Here are some Tips for making a new habit.

1. Take small steps. Don’t set a goal of reading a chapter a day, if at the moment you are lucky to read a few verses once a week. It is not realistic and you will become disillusioned to easily. That would be a bit like saying, I will run 5 kilometre a day, when at the moment, you get puffed walking around the block. It is a good long term goal, but you need to have some more manageable targets.
2. Anchor your new habit to an existing habit. You will have habits already. If you can link it to an existing one, it will be much easier. If at nine o’clock each night you brush your teeth, then maybe you can link it to this. Read for 15 minutes after I clean my teeth in the morning or night.
3. Don’t give up when you miss a few times. Maybe your new habit is going to read Bible 5 times a week. Then you miss a week. So you Give up and the enemy condemns you and you feel lousy. Remember it is a long term process. Get back going again, rather than beat yourself up because you think you have failed. Keep preserving and it will become part of your life.
4. Your habits need to change over time. If you are a mum at home with your kids, then what you did before kids will not work. Find a new pattern. Maybe one verse that you reflect on for the day. If your work hours change, develop new rhythms. If you are morning person or a night person, it will affect your pattern. There is no one set pattern. Find what works for you.

Practical

1. Get a Bible Reading Plan. Make your own. Use an existing one. Why? It will help you Read the whole Bible, not just the bits you like or are easy. It gives you a balanced diet. You don’t have to think what will I read today. You are not manipulating by reading what you want to hear
2. Get a Bible that is easy to read. Not too small a font. On line is fine. Although paper might be better. Get a good translation. WE use NLT here. NIV good. NET good. (The Passion is not a translation, despite claiming to be, similar to the Message I would not recommend it, both are paraphrase. Neither are accurate translations. (but esp the passion)
3. Understand the Big Picture and the type of the book you are reading. It is not easy to understand much of the Bible. One of the reasons we give up on the Bible is that we get stuck in bits that seem to be dry and boring. Consider the Bible to be like a rich fruit cake. Dense and rich. It helps if we understand where what we are reading fits in the Big picture. And if we understand the different styles of writing. We know this intuitively with other text we read. The lyrics of a song we understand differently from a novel, and a novel is different from a text book, and a text book is different from a newspaper article. We tend to read the Bible as if it is one genre and it is not. I don’t have time to unpack this more, but recommend a great site called the Bible Project. There is all kinds of dubious stuff on the net but this is very good. One of the series is called How to read the Bible. 5 to 10 minute clips. It also has 5 -10 minute clips with summary of each book of the Bible. This is not a substitute for reading the Bible. But great overview to help you before you start to read a book.
4. Two basic questions that should ask from any text. What can I learn from this? About God’s character, human character, command, promises etc What do you want me to do?

Reading the Bible is not for increasing our knowledge. It is about changing what we do. Re read the Parable of the two houses. House on the rock house on the sand. (Matthew 7:24-27) House on the sand collapses. House on the rock stands. Point. Build your life on a firm foundation. What is that firm foundation? This is where most people miss the point of the parable and say the firm foundation is the word of God. No Both men heard the word of God. Only one put it into practise. This is the danger of endless Bible studies; it is not about knowledge. It is about what we do with that. Too many home groups focus on Bible knowledge, but not holding each other accountable.

5. Use devotionals sparingly.

Esp. one verse devotional. Why? Consider them to be like fast food. There is nothing wrong with eating take away at times. But if our diet is take away, we know it is not healthy. The advantage of devotionals is that they are Quick and easy. Two minutes Beter than nothing. The Problem with devotionals, esp one verse ones. They often ignore the context. Better guides have a passage and some reflective questions The other problem is that someone else is giving you their thoughts. You are not taking the time to chew and allowing God to show you anything. But there is a time and a place for them.

6. If you Are in a rut. Like any habit. Get into a rut. Make a change.

If you have always used one translation, try changing to the Message for a time.

If you are used to reading like a chapter at a time, try focusing on just one verse, and meditating and memorizing it.

If you are used to just reading one verse, read big hunks to get a feel for the big picture.

Get a study Bible that will have some notes on some of the hard bits

Try reading the Bible aloud

Use a devotional for a month, or stop using a devotional.

Use a journal to record what God might be saying.

Underline or highlight bits.

Use the Bible Project Videos to help

Do something different.

Conclusion

Feed on the Word of God. 2008 Research from the Bible Society of NZ

11% of Christians read it daily

13% weekly

8% monthly

68% of Christians read it less than monthly.

That is a lot of mal nourished Christians. You will not grow spiritually. You will not become more Christ like. You will not hear God speak. Unless you begin to feed on the Word of God regularly.

Don't rely on one feeding a week on a Sunday. However, you do it. Whatever pattern works for you. Feed on God's word.

People need more than bread for their life. They must feed on every word of God.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Would you risk your life for a Bible? Why or why not?

What stops you reading the Bible as a regular habit? What is the hardest thing for you about forming a new habit?

How have your Bible reading habits changed over the years?

What ideas would you give to someone who is struggling to read the Bible at the moment?

Discuss the idea that using a one verse devotional is like fast food. Do you agree or not?

Discuss the idea of keeping each other accountable for this discipline. How would that work in your homegroup ?