

“HOW TO BE BLESSED BY THE BIBLE”

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Before the church reformers of Calvin and Luther were others lesser known. They had names like Coverdale, Tyndale, Walter Mondale, Chip ‘n Dale, and Lola the Airedale. Actually, three of those are fanciful but two are actual – Coverdale and Tyndale. These were people who believed common men and women like you and me could have the Bible in our own language. They were not satisfied with it being occasionally available in the Latin and Greek of the priests and scholars but they wanted it regularly available in the German and English of the shopkeepers and farmers. They wanted this because they believed that men and women would want to know what Eternal God had said and done, that men and women would benefit from knowing what good living is according to God and how eternal life is gained. In some cases they literally gave their lives for this cause. Tyndale, for example, was strangled in 1536 as a heretic and then his body burned at the stake. Yet when the KJV comes around, some estimate that 83% of the New Testament used there was from Tyndale and 76% of the Old Testament.

It is a testimony to the rightness of their convictions that, for example in 2016, according to the United Bible Societies 493 million Bibles were published in 18,000 languages.

But for all the Bibles in the world the transformative effects possible of the Bible haven’t been completely realized. There was a farmer who entered his mule in the Kentucky Derby and when the owners of the thoroughbreds asked him what he was thinking he answered, “I thought the company would do him good.”

With all the company of the many Bibles, you'd think it would have done us more good.

Why hasn't it? Because the blessing of the Bible isn't automatic. Life change isn't automatic just because there is a Bible in your language, a Bible in your town, a Bible in your house, or even a Bible in your hand. James is a New Testament writer who also says, just like the Reformers, that God's Word is able to bring about deep and everlasting happiness. In a passage we scooted over and now come back to for this Bible-centered Sunday, James gave some sentences about how God's Word can have a greater positive impact on our lives. Let's see what he says and before we do, let's pray.

God, here it is right here – we find more blessing from the Bible when we bend our knees before you and prayerfully ask for your illumination. We do not come to this book the way we come to any book. Rather, we ask that you would come into the process of our reading and thinking and that you would speak to us and teach us. We always want to bow not simply before a book but before you, the Lord of this book. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

James 1:19-25 My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. ²¹Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. ²²Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does.

Matthew 5:17-19 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

¹⁸I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

James begins by saying that we need to be quick to listen, slow to speak, active in cleansing ourselves from filthiness (the word means “earwax” as in “if you want to hear God’s word, get the wax out!”), and very humble in receiving God’s word. What he is saying basically is that we need to have a certain kind of mentality to benefit from God’s word. If I came up to you and told you I had a sleek, laptop computer with a QuadraPentium this, and a kajillion RAM of that, and 10 billion gigabytes of this ... that it was powerful, and you said back to me, “Powerful/shmowerful, I don’t think much of computers and everything I need is right up here in my noggin.” I would say that you are not going to get much benefit from that computer because of your mentality. Your self-sufficiency. Your brusque way. Your outlook. They keep you from the blessing.

Or if I came up to you with that laptop and you had your arms full of groceries and you didn’t say, “Powerful/shmowerful,” but you did say, “Sounds nice but I don’t have any room for it and I’m kind of busy.” Well, that would mean you have a mentality that doesn’t make space for special gifts. You may be too full of activities, of your own thoughts and worries, of others’ words and God’s word sounds powerful but you don’t make space for it. Maybe you try to squeeze that laptop between your elbow and hip and struggle through the kitchen doors of your life but that isn’t the mindset of

putting bags of Spaghetti-O's down so you can have this powerful thing in your life.

I once heard Corrie Ten Boom, that Dutch lady who was imprisoned by the Nazi's during WWII. She told of trying to use a flashlight and it didn't work. Curious she undid and found that there were a bunch of bits of paper inside blocking the connections. The mentality for clearing out space to receive God's word is so important in order to be blessed by it and it extends to the internal and moral level as well. If you have gunk in your life, the electric power of the Word isn't going to have the same flow as if you cleared out not only time for God's word but cleared out stinkin thinking as well.

There are these great tapes from a preaching conference that I once listened to. Very, very good. I was startled to find that the whole first presentation was the convener going over and over and over what our thoughts were about the Bible. Is this just a book like other books? Is this just a book that a bunch of religious types happened to get together that happened to make it through a bunch of centuries? Or is this really, really the revealed counsel of God? Is this the cradle of a message that alters lives? Is this, as the writer of Hebrews (4:13) says, an instrument that judges our thoughts? If, he said, we do not get in touch with the Bible as unique and authoritative and divine, then we will not know power for preaching. Just so, if you and I do not have a mentality that reveres this as God's word relevant for us today, a mentality of humble need, a mentality of humble thanks, then we will not derive all the benefit there is for us to have from the Bible.

Most of the rest of what James says is compressed into verse 25. There he talks about looking intently into this, the way he puts it is, perfect law of liberty. Looking. The other day I was opening mail in the kitchen and one of the boys asked me to look at something on his

Nintendo game. I glanced up from the mail, said, “Yep,” and looked back down. How different that looking is from the looking at an anniversary dinner, by the candlelight, as you stare into your loved one’s face trying to take in every little detail. James tells us not to just look but to look intently and that’s the anniversary dinner kind of looking! If you are reading the newspaper, and you pull your Bible over, open it wherever it falls, plunk your finger down, read a verse, and close it, you are looking at the Bible the way I looked at the Nintendo game. To be blessed, look intently.

Further, James adds, “and continues to do so.” There are a lot of activities in life that doing it once doesn’t amount to much. Did a push up once and they are over-rated! Sat at a piano once and the whole music thing is over-rated! Visited a college class once and the higher education bit? Over-rated! Those all bring benefit as they are continuously engaged in. Billy Graham once said that he always read the Bible first thing in the morning, every morning, and if he ran out of time, it was breakfast he ran out of time for. Why does he have the stature he has? Don’t you think part of it is that he has continuously, over the course of his life, taken in the Bible? Jesus said, you are my disciple if you *continue* in my words.

Right after this phrase James puts another. He says, “And remembers it.” The Air Force did a study once and found that people forget 95% of what they hear in 72 hours. Do you know how discouraging that is for a preacher to hear?¹ The blessing of the Bible has to do

¹ I once went into Walmart after church and because I had a tie on, I suppose, someone selling cookies outside the store asked, “Did you go to church?” I said, “Yes.” He then asked, “What was the sermon about?” I looked at him blankly because my mind was blank. He shook his head I smiling dismay. I kept walking not wanting to tell him that he didn’t know the half of it. I didn’t remember the sermon

with remembering its message. Did you ever audit a class in college? Auditing is a lot different than taking it for credit, isn't it? One doesn't stick with you in the same way because you don't have to work it the way you do with the other. James is frank and you know it from your experience too, to be blessed by the Bible you cannot audit it. You have to try to remember it. What did I read this morning? What did I read yesterday? I will memorize that key verse. If I memorized the key multiplication tables of math, I can memorize the key verses of God.

James concludes saying that the perfect liberty and deep happiness comes from doing the Word of God. If you don't do anything with the Bible, you are like a person who looks in the mirror, sees messy hair, and doesn't make any changes. What a mirror is to our outsides, the Bible is to our insides. I once was on a date and I came in afterwards, was undressing in front of the mirror, and saw a smudge of grease on my forehead. Boy, I wished I had seen a mirror earlier to have wiped it off! Can you imagine seeing the smudge in a mirror and then just ignoring it? James can't either.

The Bible is to be done. We read Jesus' words from the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount where he gives credit to the scriptures. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount he talks about the foolish and wise builders, building houses on sand and rock. The difference between the two is this – they both hear the word of God and the foolish man doesn't do the word and the wise man does do the word. They both hear but only one does.

Suppose you wanted to get physically fit and I said, "I've got a great book about diet and bodybuilding." I gave it to you and I didn't see you for six months. But

and I was the one who had preached it not forty five minutes before!
While preaching is serious to me, our minds can go blank!

when I do see you, if anything, you look less fit, not more. I ask, “Didn’t you read the book?” You reply, “Sure did. Great book. I underlined it. I used different colored highlighters. I parsed all the words. I looked each word up in the dictionary and found out every single etymology.” What’s missing? You liked it, studied it, etceteras, but you didn’t do it!

A guy slipped into the back of a church once after the service was going. He said to the usher, “Is the sermon done yet?” The wise man answered, “The sermon has been delivered but it has yet to be done.” The word needs to be done for us to be blessed.

Add to your summer reading list, the Bible. Try ten minutes a day taking on Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the New Testament. Read ready to be blessed. It takes a mentality – making space, being humble. We need to look intently, continuously, with effort, and then we need to do what we read. This is James’ prescription for how to be blessed by the Bible.

*If you would like to talk with someone about this message or your spiritual life, or to have someone pray with you, the pastors and elders of the church would welcome your call. pastorjeffwood@gmail.com www.welovefirst.org
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