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Where in the
WORD are You?

JOURNEY

CHRISTIAN MAGAZINE

Why Study Scripture?

Why Study Scripture

Anne Graham Lotz

Why Study the Old Testament?

Tim Laniak

Three Reasons for Reading the Gospels

Michael Card





Your Instruction Manual

The newly assembled shelves looked great. I stood to celebrate, then massaged my knees to rub away an hour's worth of work and wear. From this higher angle, I noticed that two central pieces were not aligned. Frustrated, I grabbed the instructions and saw that I had reversed two parts. I would need to take the entire unit apart and start over. But this time I would follow the instructions.

Sound familiar? We live in an age where complex computer programs are downloaded to instantly sync with our electronic devices. Technology has made information so instant that even "quick start" guides are becoming obsolete. It is most natural, then, to assume all aspects of life today must come to us as easily. But furniture assemblage isn't always that way; and the Christian life is never that way.

In my college days, I assumed that—because I was surrounded by Christians and being taught sound doctrine in my classes—everything I needed for the Christian life was being seamlessly downloaded into my soul. That fatal miscalculation left me unprotected as I began my search for the

best church in a town inundated with pseudo-Christian cults. I visited group after group, wondering how they could all use the Bible and each say they were the only true church and yet none of them embraced the other. Finally, I humbled myself and asked God for help. I was on the doorstep of yet another cult, which I would later learn was the Unification Church (Moonies), when I heard God's Spirit telling me to flee.

Back in my dorm room, I was led to open my Bible. This was the manual I should have studied more carefully before trying to become a pioneer for the Christian faith.

As I read 1 John, I was shown five tests for discerning both false prophets and deceiving spirits. I wept over those pages and was set free. The manual showed me that there is a dark force in the world that seems very much like the light. And this power has the world in its grip. Some of the nicest, brightest, most well-meaning people

may be sincere about following these pseudo-Christian groups, but they are sincerely deceived.

But isn't that the danger for each of us? Without proper guidance, we may make decisions that later have to be undone. Whether wrestling with a bothersome vice, a business venture, or a basic life value, we need wisdom to ensure our decisions are sound. The Bible instructs us to know the way of God, which is wisdom.

Scripture Awakening and all of its resources—Journey Christian Magazine—are designed to help us keep our minds in the Manual. It isn't enough to have a Bible. We need to know and live by it. If you haven't experienced our newest resource, Bible in 90 Days Plus, I encourage you to check it out at ScriptureAwakening.com. It will introduce you afresh to the world's most essential Manual, the Bible.



WILLIAM P. CAMPBELL
Author, Founder and President of Scripture Awakening. Host of Beyond Words Radio.

If you should slip and reach rope's end;
You'll find the hem of His garment; So
don't let go of that Thread of Hope."

My favorite lyric from a Jeff and Sheri Easter song played itself time and again in my mind while we at Journey prepared this Why Study Scripture? issue for you. If you've never heard "Thread of Hope," I highly recommend you request it from your favorite gospel station or see the video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g1ze9LsN-bc>).

The Thread of Hope that runs steadily through this song is Jesus Christ; it also runs from one end of Scripture to the other, weaving the entire Word of God masterfully together. Granted, this Thread winds through the Word on a path that may require some effort to discover—but I promise you it's there.

And it's the most beautiful shade of crimson you've ever seen! I pray the articles in this issue stir your heart with a passion for tracing the handprints of Jesus from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22.

So eager am I for you to find this Thread that I'm giving you some landmarks to watch for along your journey. Behold your Hope—Jesus Christ:

- Promised Seed (Genesis 3:15);
- Passover Lamb (Exodus 12:5);
- High Priest (Leviticus 21:10);
- Rising Star (Numbers 24:17);
- The Two Laws (Deuteronomy 6:5);
- Captain of the Lord of Hosts (Joshua 5:15);
- Covenant Angel (Judges 13:18);
- Kinsman Redeemer (Ruth 4:14);
- David's Descendant (2 Samuel 7:12);
- Greater than the Temple (1 Kings 7:50b);
- The King's Son (2 Chronicles 13:5);
- Rebuilder (Ezra 1:3);
- Restorer (Nehemiah 2:5);
- Sovereign Savior (Esther 4:14, 16);
- Mediator (Job 9:33);
- Song (Psalms 119:54);
- Wisdom (Proverbs 2:6);
- One in 1000 (Ecclesiastes 7:28);

Find in Scripture the Ultimate 'Thread of Hope'



- Bridegroom (Song of Solomon 6:3a);
- Branch (Isaiah 11:1, 27:6);
- Righteousness (Jeremiah 33:15);
- Judge (Lamentations 3:59, 64);
- Shepherd (Ezekiel 37:24);
- Cornerstone (Daniel 9:25);
- Latter Rain (Hosea 6:3);
- Zion's Dwelling (Joel 3:21);
- Builder (Amos 9:11);
- Deliverer (Obadiah 17);
- Salvation (Jonah 2:9);
- Lord of Kings (Micah 5:2, 4);
- Stronghold (Nahum 1:7);
- Joy/Confidence (Habakkuk 3:18);
- Mighty Lord (Zephaniah 3:17);
- Desire of Nations (Haggai 2:7);
- Our Servant (Zechariah 3:8);
- Son of Righteousness (Malachi 4:2);
- Messiah (Matthew 1:1a, 27:11);
- God's Servant (Mark 10:44);
- God's Representative (Luke 3:23, 38; 5:24a);
- God's Son (John 1:18, 20:31);
- Gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4);
- Justification (Romans 4:25; 5:1);
- Sanctification (1 Corinthians 1:30);
- Righteousness (Galatians 5:5);
- Heavenly Standing (Ephesians 2:6);
- Strengthened (Philippians 4:13);
- Completeness (Colossians 2:10);
- Glorification (1 Thessalonians 2:12; 4:16-17);
- The Faithful (2 Timothy 2:2);
- Fellow Laborer (Titus 3:8);
- Love of a Believer (Philemon 5);
- High Priest for Sin (Hebrews 3:1; 9:11);
- Royal Law (James 2:8);
- Pastor (1 Peter 5:4);
- Advocate (1 John 4:17);

- Beloved (Jude 3);
- King of Kings/Lord of Lords (Revelation 17:14).

Left to itself, this list is just that—a list of landmarks. But when we take time along the journey to look at what lies between these landmarks, we find specifically how this oft-unseen Thread of Hope serves people when they most need something to cling to. For starters:

- Abraham, struggling to believe God's promises (Genesis 26:24);
- Joseph's brothers, owning their past deeds (Genesis 50:19);
- Joshua, trying to fill Moses' role (Joshua 8:1);
- Ruth, helpless at the feet of Boaz (Ruth 3:11);
- Daniel, maintaining his convictions (Daniel 3:18);
- Paul, steadying himself on a sinking ship (Acts 27:24).

And the thing is that these examples, and others like them, show a world so desperately seeking-yet-not-finding answers in life that Jesus Christ is the Ultimate Hope for which it searches.

So I urge you to dig into Scripture, grasp the Thread, and don't let go. Your hope depends on it.



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Within your soul resides your ability to think, reason, and will. And what goes on inside your soul gives outward expression in the many ways you behave.

You, as a person, are primarily known by your behavior; those behaviors are shaped by what goes on in your soul. For instance, if I allow my mind to be consumed with **worry**, it shows up in my body language and conversation. After a strong session with worry, I realize I've become mentally and emotionally exhausted. That gives way to physical tiredness and lack of excitement for anything else going on in my life.

Likewise, **anger** takes its toll physically and relationally. I've seen women become so angry with their teenagers that later on they wished again and again they could revisit those moments with calmer and saner behaviors.

As God's daughters, though, we have an escape plan. We cannot keep the world from clamoring on around us—giving us plenty of reasons to worry, feel angry, unproductive, overwhelmed, etc. But we *can* hunker down in the promises of Scripture and form our responses to every stressor that slaps us in the face.

A routine of studying God's Word will usher in calmness and establish a buffer between the soul and whatever the world throws our way.

Scripture Study is Healthy for Your Soul!

Here's my game plan:

When I realize I'm being swayed by worry, the passage I run to is John 14. I spend time reading through the chapter imagining the troubled thoughts inside those disciples' hearts. I soak in the comforting words of Jesus offering His peace as the antidote to their worry and fear. I take the time to study the meaning of His words spoken and how they relate to my worry status. For example, take a look at what Jesus says in John 14:1.

Do not let your heart be troubled. The word "troubled" comes from the Greek word *tarasso*, meaning "agitated with inward commotion." As I relax and reflect on His words, I realize He's speaking directly to me! He sees the churning and agitation in my soul. I sense Him comforting me and calling me to focus on Him instead of on my worry. Lingering in conversation with Him with His Word spread before me,

steadies me and empowers me to rein in my worry instead of letting it run away with me.

Truly, spending time with Jesus changes everything! It's not that we become perfect in the process, but we certainly do become healthier in our thinking and behaviors. I smile now remembering how my young boys *always* encouraged my time with Jesus. They knew that Mama was nicer, more patient, and extra forgiving after I'd been alone with Him reading the Bible.

He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall remain stable and fixed under the shadow of the Almighty (Psalm 91:1 AMPC).



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JOURNEY CHRISTIAN MAGAZINE

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Taking God's Word to Work

My relationship with God began when I was an aerospace engineer. Three months later I was transferred to a new branch in California. I knew I needed to identify myself as a Christian in a subtle way early on, or it would be more difficult later; besides, identification in Christ has an effect on how one behaves. I didn't want my relationship with God to be a Sunday-only experience.

In my devotions, I was struck by the words in Colossians 3:22-24:

Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

So I went to work for God at Honeywell, which made me a better engineer. I sensed the Lord leading me to start a Bible study, so I asked the personnel office if I could use a conference room at noon on Wednesdays and post a note on the community

bulletin board. They gave me permission, but a Jewish man tore the note off and brought it to my cubicle.

"You can't bring Jesus in here," he said.

I responded, "I can't leave Him out. Every day I come in, He comes in with me." He didn't like my answer and immediately went to the personnel office. They called me in and apologetically withdrew permission. I told them I didn't want to create problems for them, and asked if I could just post a notice and meet next door at a restaurant for breakfast. They said that would be fine.

I was pleasantly surprised when 18 men showed up. There were some "secret service" Christians who were emboldened by the study, and one of my colleagues became a believer. A year later I resigned to attend semi-

nary, and he took over the Bible study. Another year later I had lunch with him, and he reminded me of our Jewish friend who was against bringing Jesus into the plant. He became seriously ill. My friend visited him at the hospital and led him to Christ. I was a spiritual grandparent.

I am thankful to this day that I learned to be an ambassador for Christ where I worked. It was my first ministry that led to full time ministry.

True disciples bloom where they are planted; therefore, go to work for God where you are employed, and "sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence" (1 Peter 3:15).



DR. NEIL T. ANDERSON

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Why Study the Old Testament?

You’ve probably heard something like this from a well-meaning believer: “The God of the Old Testament is harsh and judgmental. The God of the New Testament is more loving and merciful.” Or maybe: “I’m sure glad I don’t live under the Old Covenant. All those laws were such a burden!”

You might have also heard this recent quote from a well-known evangelical preacher:

“Christians need to unhitch the Old Testament from their faith. The apostles unhitched the church from the worldview, value system, and regulations of the Jewish scriptures.” (Sermon: Aftermath, Part 3: Not Difficult, by Andy Stanley)

Although most “Bible-believing Christians” wouldn’t knowingly denigrate the Old Testament, there is a widespread tendency to undervalue it, at least in practice. Whether it’s because of the Levitical laws, the genealogies or the judgment oracles, the theological and spiritual benefit of the Hebrew Scriptures just seems harder to realize.

When I hear students say they have trouble understanding the Old Testament, I find the real issue is misunderstanding the whole Bible. We think the God of the Old Testament

is different from the God of the New Testament when the disparity is between the God of the Bible and a God we have imagined. This inevitably impacts our view of the value of the Old Testament for living the Christian life.

First, a look at the God of both Testaments.

When you read the Gospels you find yourself in a divinely choreographed Old Testament echo chamber that informs the identity of Jesus Christ: He is a New Moses and Son of David, a Holy Priest and Sacrificial Lamb, the Tabernacle and Temple, and the very God—YHWH—who controls the storms and forgives sins.

More specific “typology” runs throughout the narratives: the 40-day temptation and the 40-year sojourn in the desert, the 12 apostles and the 12 tribes of Israel, the feeding of the 5000 as a new heavenly manna, to name a few. At a higher level, Jesus is the One who initiates the Second Exodus by rescuing his scattered flock (Ezekiel 34). He is

the One who initiates the New Covenant during Passion week by fulfilling the covenants with Abraham and David. And Jesus is the Creator (John 1:1) who will bring about the New Creation pictured in Revelation 21.

These patterns and echoes are not just extra color for the well-informed. They are the very fabric of Biblical revelation. Who could Jesus be *apart from* the fulfillment of these promises, prophecies and typologies? He must be a fabrication of our misunderstanding.

And what difference does that make in terms of our discipleship?

A *big* difference.

When the *Biblical* Jesus calls us to take his “yoke” upon us (Matthew 11:29), we are largely unaware that he is calling us to follow him on a path of righteousness that “exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees” (Matthew 5:16-17). The prophets predicted a New Covenant in which *God’s Spirit would enable God’s people to keep God’s Law*, now written on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33). The New Covenant is not about liberation from the Law, but freedom and power to keep it! That message is central to the book of Galatians, a book often quoted to disparage the Law! (cf. Galatians 5:18-25).

Remember what Paul’s word about the value of *all* Scripture? It is “...useful for...correcting and training in *righteousness*, so that the servant of God may be *thoroughly equipped for every good work*.” (2 Tim 3:16-17 NIV)

Paul was referring to the only Bible they had: the Old Testament. And that Bible is so thoroughly hyperlinked in the New Testament, we simply can’t live without it!



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Three Reasons for Reading the Gospels

I have walked with Jesus for over 55 years, read the Gospels numerous times, and written songs and books from them. It amazes me, though, how much remains to learn about even the simplest things concerning His life.

At a study I once lead, someone asked if I could name Jesus' brothers. I could not give their names, although they are clearly provided in Matthew 13:55. Discouraged, I wondered, "Is Jesus knowable?"

Absolutely, He is! But you don't simply squeeze the Gospels dry. You are never an expert or "done" with the Gospels—or perhaps they're never quite done with you! We must actively seek new ways to listen to the Gospels; ask new questions, find new approaches. There are three reasons for doing so.

1 We read the Gospels to learn about Christ's world.

The Gospels provide a crystal-clear picture of the fragmented, First-Century world of Jesus. There was dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; when we add the Roman occupancy to the picture, the brokenness—even the outright danger of Jesus' world comes into focus. But rather than presenting a one-dimensional

picture of this culture, the Gospels introduce us to complex characters like Nicodemus. They even portray positive images of Roman centurions who come to Jesus for help and are genuinely appreciative when they receive it. When you double-check these portrayals against secular sources, the facts corroborate, providing accurate, imaginative pictures of Jesus' world.

2 We read the Gospels to learn the mind of Jesus.

Was there ever a more plainspoken-yet-eloquent mind than Jesus' mind? Like his contemporaries, He is multilingual, speaking perhaps three languages. Like no other teacher, He creates imaginative innovations to help his listeners understand the true nature of the Law of Moses. He re-popularizes the parable as a form for engaging their imaginations. He shatters old definitions, confronts the old orthodoxy with new reality, and presents a clear vision of the End Times. His mind is always focused on the Kingdom.

Jesus is a courageous thinker, taking the risk of not being understood or even being abandoned by his followers (John 6:60). He points us toward the Father by doing what His Father tells him to do (John.5:19, 12:49).

3 We read the Gospels to know the heart of Jesus.

The Gospels portray an emotional complexity in Jesus. In Mark 1, He shows both compassion and anger. In Luke 10:21, He is filled with joy through the Holy Spirit. In John 7:37 He confronts a crowd of many thousands. He is tender with children, yet roars like a lion in the Temple. He is desperate in the Garden of Gethsemane. But He is always motivated by righteous love.

In the end, the three become one. Knowing His world, His mind and His heart results in sound knowledge of Jesus. That is why we must actively absorb the Gospels. Even after millennia of the strictest scrutiny, they—like the rest of Scripture—have demonstrated themselves accurate and absolutely trustworthy. For those who embrace them by faith, God's Word is nothing less than "God breathed." And *that* is why we can never squeeze it dry or "get to the bottom" of it.



MICHAEL CARD

Award winning musician, Bible teacher, author, and advisory board member of Scripture Awakening.



Why Study Scripture

Have you ever wished God would speak to you as He spoke to people in Scripture? God does speak today...through His Word. You have to read it in order to hear His voice. The Bible is more than a manual for living a fully blessed life. It is God's living Word. Every day I read the Scriptures, listening for His voice. While I don't hear an audible sound, often a verse seems to leap off the page and speak directly into my heart...

...When I was diagnosed with cancer, I asked God if I should tell my family. He spoke clearly to me from Deuteronomy 29:29: "...Those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children..." So I told them.

...Before my first chemotherapy treatment, when advised of the side effects, I felt like I was being sucked into a black whirlpool over which I had no escape. The next morning I read from Job 42:12: "The LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning." Peace flooded me as God seemed to indicate my cancer experience was not a whirlpool—but a journey with purpose.

...After my fifth chemo treatment, I wanted to quit because the side effects were so severe. While praying, God seemed to indicate He had healed me. I

asked Him to confirm from His Word if I was to quit treatments. Two hours later my daughter shared with me from 2 Kings 5 the story of the Syrian general Naaman who had leprosy and was told that Elisha, a man of God, could heal him. Elisha told Naaman "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan... and you will be cleansed." Naaman resisted, not wanting the "side-effects" of muck and mud. But at his servant's urging, Naaman did dip in the Jordan. After the seventh time, he was healed! The seventh time! I knew God was confirming that I was to continue chemo...my next and last treatments would be my sixth and seventh times! So...I completed the infusions.

Sometimes God seems to give me a promise that doesn't come to pass... my faith has been challenged. During one such crisis, triggered by a promise I thought God had given me but was unfulfilled...I was devastated, feeling empty, foolish, and spiritually naive. Then the Spirit whispered from Isaiah 30:18, "Therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you." And I knew His promise would be fulfilled, and my faith rebounded as I chose to trust Him and wait on His timing.

These examples are only a few ways that God's Word has spoken to me. Would I have made the same deci-

sions without what He said? Would I have had the same perseverance, comfort, wisdom, and direction if I hadn't read my Bible, listening for His voice? I don't think so. Instead it has enabled me to live with energetic confidence, knowing God always leads in the right path.

I'm reminded of my mother's advice and example: *Read your Bible. Every day. Study it. Love it. Live by it. I urge you to take her wise counsel, then follow my father's example and think about what you are reading. Listen for God's whispers. He speaks through His Word. I know.*

(Adapted from *Jesus in Me*)

On Anne's website, you will find directions on how to read your Bible so you, too, can hear His whispers. Follow the instructions, then start listening: annegrahamlotz.org/learningtohearhisvoice/



ANNE GRAHAM LOTZ
Proclaiming God's Word worldwide for 40+ years. Author of bestselling book "Jesus in Me".



What a Difference a Verse Makes!

Have you ever found yourself in a situation and suddenly words of a hymn, praise chorus or scripture start going through your mind? Often the words help you to refocus or—even better—to stop agonizing over the situation. They help you to slow down and feel a sense of peace in knowing God is bigger than your situation.

In the same way, Mary—the mother of Jesus—recalled Scriptures and songs from the time the angel Gabriel brought her the message that she would carry the Messiah. Through her son’s ministry, trial, crucifixion, resurrection and the days to follow, the comfort she received from her knowledge of Scripture was no doubt what she pondered many times.

As a young Jewish girl, Mary went with her family to the temple, experienced the Hebrew Scriptures and lived according to their laws. She was taught how God saved His people; she participated in Jewish traditions commanded by God; she received a blessing each Shabbat from her parents. Her heart understood that God reigned over all creation and loved His people.

Imagine when she heard the words spoken to her by the angel Gabriel: *The Holy Spirit will come upon you and you will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel.* Words spoken long ago in Isaiah 7:14 were now being spoken over *her*. She accepted God’s plan based on trust in Him and belief in what she had learned.

When she visited her cousin Elizabeth shortly afterward, she burst forth into the song of praise we know as the Magnificat (see Matthew 2). Her praise and trust contained some of the same language as the song Hannah sang praising God for her son Samuel in I Samuel 2. The words of Hannah easily flowed from Mary because she had studied them; they were a part of her knowledge of Scripture.

There are so many instances when things happened regarding Jesus that

Scripture surely reminded her about God’s providence and brought comfort—perhaps no instance so much as when she stood at the foot of the cross of her Son, grieving but knowing His death was a part of what had been foretold. Amid the grief, and although perhaps subconsciously, she may have recalled Psalm 19:5 as she watched the guards cast lots for His clothes—or Isaiah 53:5 when she saw them pierce His side.

Picture however, her joy on that third day when it all began to make sense!

The comfort brought by the Scriptures to Mary is the same comfort we find when the Word of God is deeply rooted within our minds and hearts. Scripture can take us from our desperate situations to trusting that God is always with us. We will face difficulties but, like Mary, carrying the Word of God in our hearts can make all the difference in how we face them.



JANET JOHNSON

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Honoring the Elderly Among Us

“Just like that! Just like that!” he would say, snapping his fingers and shaking his head. “You won’t believe how fast the time goes...just like that!” *Snap!*

Early on in our married life my wife and I would take our boys to see her maternal grandparents. At first, of course, it was just my oldest son when he was a baby. Ernest Moseley, Angie’s grandfather, would hold our little boy—bouncing him on his knee—and often say those words to us. “Just like that! Just like that!” He said this many times, and I’m sure I was mostly thinking, “Yeah, right. That’s just what old people say.” It’s not that I didn’t love and respect him, it’s that at 24 years old I simply could not understand what he was feeling and trying to say.

Proverbs 23:22-25 reminds us of this:

“Listen to your father, who gave you life, and don’t despise your mother when she is old. Get the truth and never sell it; also get wisdom, discipline, and good judgment. The father of godly children has cause for joy. What a pleasure to have children who are wise. So give your father and

mother joy! May she who gave you birth be happy.” (NLT)

Solomon recommends that we listen to our fathers—nothing much has changed there. He encourages us to be kind to our mothers when they are old. Perhaps, more importantly, he indicates in that we need truth, wisdom and good judgement when we are young.

Mark Twain also said, “Good judgement comes from experience, and experience comes from poor judgement.” So it takes time. It takes life’s ups and downs. It takes mountains and valleys before we finally understand.

I’m older now—not retired but I can see it from here—and I understand, more and more, what Mr. Moseley was trying to say so many years ago. I understand what Twain was trying to say as well. When we’re young we think we know so much more than our parents. As we age, however, we begin to see how little we really

knew back then and how much wisdom there is to gain in life. I often tell young couples who’ve just had their first baby, “Now you’ll understand.” Until you hold that sweet bundle of joy, you cannot begin to fathom just how much your parents loved you, or just how much they wanted the best for you. I also remind them that you don’t pay for your raising until you raise your own.

So “give your father and mother joy”; make your mom glad she brought you into this world! And remember, the next time you are on the road behind an older gentleman, or in grocery aisle behind a slower older lady, don’t look at them as an inconvenience in your fast paced, important life. Look at them as founts of wisdom, as athletes who have already run the race, and as those who may have forgotten more wisdom than you’ll ever learn. Treat them like you would want to be treated at their age—you are heading there fast—“Just like that!” *Snap.*



TIM BRYANT

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Losin' Our Religion

One Person at a Time



Too often, we assume that religion—especially Christianity—is merely an opinion, expression of emotion, blind faith, unproven claims; that actively embracing a particular religion reflects a baseless, personal preference—like choosing one fast food chain over another.

The assumption is so widespread we barely notice it. Consider another example. To Marilyn vos Savant's *Parade Magazine* column, a man wrote that his parents raised him in a certain religion. Now an adult, he still likes the religion, but his friends are trying to get him to consider others. He wonders if he should consider those arguments or just go on accepting his parents' religion. Savant responds:

*"You're smarter than those friends. Religions cannot be proved true intellectually. They come from the heart—and your parents—not the mind. In my opinion, you have behaved wisely [by not listening to your friends' "arguments"]."*¹

Ideas like Savant's are not limited to the unbelieving world: Christians adopt it, too—a fact that causes young people to leave the church. Barna president David Kinnaman suggests six reasons for their exodus. Four relate to our discussion:

1. the church's shallowness of thought, including its Biblical teachings and practices;
2. the church is an unsafe place to express doubts and get answers to questions;

3. the church's isolation—it fails to interact fairly and in an informed manner with the surrounding cultural ideas; and
4. the church's anti-science attitude, its failure to discuss scientific developments and to equip believers to relate Christian doctrine to scientific claims.²

Instead of equipping people to meet the world head-on with solid reasons for Christianity, the church has become its own gravedigger: the very practices that cause memberships to rise and budgets to balance render the church increasingly anemic and marginalized. We try to "grow the church":

1. with watered-down, intellectually void preaching that is always applied to a person's private life but not with broad cultural, intellectual, and moral issues facing us all;
2. by emphasizing worship and good Christian music; and
3. by trying to nourish people through small groups.

There is nothing wrong with the last two practices, but conspicuously absent is any place in weekly church practice for people to learn, to exercise their minds, to be equipped to defend their faith and develop into godly, intelligent Christ-followers. People lack courage to stand up for their faith because they haven't learned how to do so; thus, when challenged, they falter.

The point is that we are largely at the mercy of preconceptions. For two reasons, that statement should cause deep personal reflection for believers.³

1. Scripture clarifies that it's not enough for us to know *what* we believe. We must know *why* we believe and be able to express the rational basis of Christianity to young disciples and to unbelievers (1 Peter 3:15; Jude 3; Acts 17:2-4, 17; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5). Failure to know *why* we believe is a sin of omission.
2. Through said knowledge of *why*, people receive the call to lead, act in public, and accomplish important tasks. We give certain people the right to fix our cars, pull our teeth, etc., because we take those people to possess relevant knowledge. It is the possession of knowledge of *why*—not merely *what*—that gives people confidence and courage to lead, act, risk. Accordingly, it is crucial that we promote the central teachings of Christianity in general, and the Kingdom distinctives of the Vineyard in particular, as a body of knowledge; not as a set of faith-practices to be accepted on the basis of mere belief or shared narrative alone. To accomplish this, we must emphasize knowing *why* we believe as much as knowing *what* we believe.

Our culture is slouching towards that of secularized Western Europe, and the church is increasingly marginalized. Let's reverse this trend by refocusing attention on *why* we believe the Bible in the first place. Why... it matters!

¹ Marilyn vos Savant, "Ask Marilyn," *Parade Magazine* (October 7, 2001), 25.

² Eric Reed, compiler of information from David Kinnaman, "Six Reasons Why Young People Leave the Church," *Leadership Journal* (Winter 2012), online at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2012/winter/youngleavechurch.html>.

³ See J. P. Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2018); *Finding Quiet* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2019).



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His Word: A Shelter in Life's Storms



As kids, both of us had a large tree in our yard. Bill would climb his tree to see how high he could go, I would climb mine with a book to find the just perfect branch that would provide a comfortable seat to sit on, enjoy a cool breeze and read the afternoon away. These trees provided enjoyment for us, but also important shade for the homes we lived in. These trees were firmly rooted, endured violent storms, raging winds—and still stood strong.

When the Covid-19 crisis hit, and those in our world looked to us to give them comfort from God's Word, we thanked God for our decades with every day spent in the Word. Those daily quiet times, those days of digging deeper into the Bible, those years as students sitting under other wise Bible teachers—each provided branches of wisdom that others climb under with us to find shelter from the storm of uncertainty.

The Spirit is like a seed planted in the ground. Its influence starts out small, but under the right conditions will grow to be the best part of your life. You can create those conditions by **PLANT**-ing and **WATER**-ing.

First, **PLANT** God's Word into your life consistently:

- **Probe** (2 Timothy 2:15: “a worker... who correctly handles the word of truth.”) This is the process of studying God's Word so it makes sense to us.
- **Listen** (Romans 10:17: “faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”) Hearing other people teach the Bible and relate how it is affecting their lives encourages growth in all of us.
- **Acquaint** yourself (Deuteronomy 17:19: “he is to read it all the days of his life.”) There is no substitute for reading God's Word consistently.
- **Nail** it down (Psalm 119:11: “I have hidden your word in my heart.”) Memorizing specific verses makes them readily accessible when we need them the most.
- **Think** it over (Psalm 1:2: “Blessed is the one...who meditates on [God's] law day and night.”) Asking questions like, “How do I live this out? And how does this apply to my life?” energize God's Word in our lives.

Second, **WATER** your relationship with God through interactive prayer:

- **Wait** for God (Romans 8:16: “The

Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.”) Listen in prayer by saying, “God, You go first,” and then assume the thoughts that come to mind are what God wants to talk to you about.

- **Acknowledge** your sin to God (1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”)
- **Thank** God (1 Thessalonians 5:18: “give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”)
- **Exalt** God (Psalm 103:1: “Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise His holy name.”)
- **Request** of God (Philippians 4:6: “in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”)

May the Word of God shelter you from the storms in your life.



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Nothing New: A History of Social Distancing

Social distancing is not a new strategy. In Biblical days, leprosy was feared highly contagious; becoming afflicted led to severe social stigma. In fact, those afflicted with the deadly disease had to cover their faces and yell, “Unclean!” as they walked the streets. This cry alerted others to stay away.

One of the earliest examples of social distancing in the Bible is recounted in 2 Kings 5:1-19.

Naaman was the commander of the Syrian army. He was successful, powerful and renowned. One problem: He had contracted leprosy. A slave girl told Naaman of a prophet in her home country of Israel who could heal this disease. With the Syrian king’s blessing and an incredible sum of silver and gold, Naaman set off to find the prophet Elisha.

Surprisingly, when Naaman’s entourage arrived, Elisha did not come out to greet him. Instead he practiced social distancing and offered simple instructions. “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times,” said Elisha, “and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean.”

It angered Naaman that Elisha wouldn’t come to him personally, and he was angrier still that Elisha prescribed something so simple to overcome such a deadly disease. I’m sure Naaman was filled with doubt as he repeatedly entered and left the river. As he washed the seventh time, however, Naaman’s “flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.” (2 Kings 5:4, NKJV)

After he was healed, Naaman vowed to Elisha that he would “no longer offer either burnt offering or sacrifice to other gods, but to the Lord.” (2 Kings 5:17b.)

My friends, Naaman was dealing with a *physical* disease, but all of us deal with a *spiritual* disease. Naaman had *leprosy*, but we have *sin*. And there are lessons to be learned from Naaman’s story:

- **We can’t save ourselves.** Naaman had conquered entire nations, but was helpless to stop the decay in his own body. Similarly, there’s nothing you or I can do to save ourselves spiritually.
- **Money and power can’t save us.** Naaman knew the kings of Syria and Israel, and they couldn’t help him. He carried silver and gold, and that didn’t do him any good. You may have all the money and influ-

ence possible, but that can’t save you from your sin.

- **Only God can save us.** To be clear, Elisha didn’t practice social distancing out of fear. He did it to show the power of God which knows no bounds. Elisha could have touched Naaman’s skin or waved his hand over the open wounds, which is what Naaman expected. Elisha wanted Naaman to understand that healing wasn’t his work, but God’s.

In the days of Naaman and Elisha, people were concerned about leprosy. Today, much of the world is gripped in fear over the spread and impact of the coronavirus. The fact of the matter, however, is that all of mankind is infected by sin, and cleansing only comes through the power and grace of God.

Like Naaman in the Jordan River, the remedy is surprisingly simple. You need to repent, turn from sin, and surrender to Jesus. If you have not yet placed your faith in Him, I pray you do it now. Only He can cure the disease of sin and save you for eternity.



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Prayer Opens Hearts

Do you pray strategically for changed lives?

Whether we realize it or not, prayer is one of the most effective tools we have in the battle to win people for Jesus Christ. The problem is, we often don't engage in strategic prayer. Our prayers are centered around ourselves instead of others. We may ask that God gives us the strength to be a witness for Him—and that is good—but we fail to pray in a way that God can use to open people's hearts.

Prayer opens hearts. The first thing we must realize is that the Holy Spirit draws people to salvation, not us. He speaks to hearts and woos them to Himself. He is the One who convicts us of sin and leads us to repentance. Jesus told us in John 16:13, *“But when He, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.”*

Do you know someone who doesn't know Jesus? Pray. Are you burdened for people around you who are lost and without hope? Pray. Spend time every day praying for the hearts of those who don't yet know Jesus. Mention them by name to God. Ask the Holy Spirit to soften their hearts to-

wards Him. Intercede on their behalf; then pray for opportunities to share God's love with them.

Prayer changes us. As we begin to pray daily for the hearts of those around us, our own hearts begin to change. The Holy Spirit works in us and deepens our compassion for the lost. He breaks our hearts for the people we are lifting up in prayer; then He compels us to act.

When our hearts are broken for the lost, we cannot sit silently and watch the people we love die without the hope of knowing Jesus Christ.

Ask God to open doors and give opportunity to share His love with the people we are praying for. God desires that we spread His Word. He commanded us, as believers, to share it (Matthew 28:19-20). So we can be confident that He will provide those opportunities. We just need to open our eyes and watch for them.

Prayer gives us boldness. *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be My witnesses...”* (Acts 1:8). Opportunities to share our faith are everywhere around us. But when we start praying for them, we begin to see them clearly.

Don't stop praying. Invite the Holy Spirit to join the conversation. He will give you the words to say. He will continue to work on the heart of the person who is hearing about God's love. Pray that He will intervene in that person's life and change it for eternity!

Prayer cannot be separated from witnessing. It is the essence of sharing our faith. We cannot reach someone's heart without the Holy Spirit, and we reach the Holy Spirit through the power of prayer. So, I invite you to begin praying strategically for those around you. Rely on the Holy Spirit to open doors and guide you into conversations.

Then share the Gospel with boldness!



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Shaping a Nation in Scripture

What is in our heart will become evident, whether in words or actions (Matthew 12:34).

Many people can't recognize Scripture phrases today without the corresponding reference, but this was not always the case. America's Founding Fathers used Biblical phrases extensively without the references.

During early disagreements of the Constitutional Convention, furthermore, Benjamin Franklin addressed the delegates in a short speech quoting thirteen Bible verses.

In this situation of this assembly, groping, as it were, in the dark [Job 12:25] to find political truth, and scarce able to distinguish it when presented to us, how has it happened, sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of Lights [James 1:17] to illuminate our understandings [James 1:5]? In the beginning of the contest with Britain when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayers in this room for the Divine Protection. Our prayers, sir, were heard, and they were graciously answered...I have lived, sir, a long

time; and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth: that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice [Matt 10:29, Luke 12:6], is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid [Dan 4:17, Ps 75:7]? We have been assured, sir, in the Sacred Writings that except the Lord build the House, they labor in vain that build it [Ps 127:1]. I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without His concurring aid, we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel [Gen 11:1-9] ...and we ourselves shall become a reproach and a byword [Deut 28:37, 2 Chr 7:20, 1 Ki 9:7, Ps 44:14] down to future ages.¹

Patrick Henry gave a speech as conflict began between America and England. He also quoted numerous Bible verses.

Besides, sir, we shall not fight our battles alone [2 Chr 32:8]. There is a just God [2 Thes 1:6, Deut 32:4] Who presides over the destinies of nations [Dan 4:17, Ps 75:7], and Who will raise up friends to fight our battles for us. The battle, sir, is not to the strong alone [Ecc 9:11]; it is to the vigilant, the active, the brave...Gentlemen may cry, "Peace, Peace," but there is no peace [Jer 6:14, 8:11]. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to

our ears the clash of resounding arms [Jer 50:22]! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle [Matt 20:6]? ...Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me [Josh 24:15], give me liberty or give me death!²

John Quincy Adams affirmed that:

"...with regard to the history contained in the Bible...it is not so much praiseworthy to be acquainted with as it is shameful to be ignorant of it."³

Let us study the Bible so we can recognize where Scripture was used by those who shaped America!

¹ James Madison, *The Papers of James Madison*, Henry D. Gilpin, editor (Washington: Langtree and O'Sullivan, 1840), Vol. II, pp. 984-985, Benjamin Franklin on June 28, 1787.

² *Sketches of the Life and Character of Patrick Henry*, William Wirt (James Webster: 1818), p. 123, speech on March 23, 1775.

³ John Quincy Adams, *Letters of John Quincy Adams to His Son on the Bible and Its Teachings* (New York: Derby, Miller, & Co., 1848), p. 34.



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