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JOURNEY

CHRISTIAN MAGAZINE



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Digging for Gold

They are more precious than gold...
(Psalm 19:10)

As a young man, I visited a river in Oregon to dig and pan for gold. I didn't find much. A decade later, I went with a college group to remote regions of Columbia, South America, where our team leader taught us how to find the purest of gold—in God's Word (see Psalm 19:10). He provided us tools and techniques for success, even for Scripture's hard parts.

The most important tool in his box was inductive Bible study, a time-tested method by which one can *observe*, *interpret*, and *apply* the text. He taught us to run systematically through Scripture, covering a paragraph or more each day. I brought what I learned back to my college dorm, and used that simple tool to dig for gold over the next few years, and struck it nearly every day. It enriched my life!

Here are three simple principles I discovered:

1 It is important to set a time and place and to be consistent. Better a little bit every day than big sporadic efforts.

2 Take notes on what you are learning. Even if you never read your notes again, by simply writing what you learn, you are more likely to retain it.



3 It is good to have a go-to person, a commentary, or other reliable tools available for reference.

4 The more you know the Bible, the more it explains itself to you.

5 **When you come to apparent Bible difficulties, if you dig at those spots you are likely to hit a gold vein.**

This has been my experience time and again. You see, when unsolved mysteries, unresolved questions, and unbridled doubts appear on the surface, they force you to dig more deeply. And that is where the riches are often hidden.

Scripture Awakening exists to help you find the gold; our resources are designed around inductive Bible study principles. Most people get started with our reading program, Bible in 90 Days. The new online version has the *read* (observe), *reflect* (interpret), and *respond* (apply) method built into every day's dig. You can try it out a whole month for free at ScriptureAwakening.com.

I could tell you a hundred stories of my own about how the hard parts of Scripture contain riches waiting to be discovered; however, I would much prefer to hear your stories. If you would like to join our weekly B90+ discussions dealing with Bible difficulties and discoveries, please email us at: dwinkle@scriptureawakening.com. If you would like to post some of your questions, suggestions, or learnings about the hard parts of the Bible, please do so at ScriptureAwakening.com/blog.

If you have ideas about ways that we can better assist Christians along their journey of spiritual growth, please pass them on to us! In the meantime, keep digging!



WILLIAM P. CAMPBELL

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JOURNEY
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Journey Christian Magazine is a ministry of Scripture Awakening. Scripture Awakening provides resources to help equip you to READ, STUDY, and LIVE God's Word, awakening you to its transformative power for your life, your community, and world.

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The Right Time to Shake Some Dust

[Jesus said,] If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet. (Matthew 10:14)

What passages come to mind at the phrase, “Scripture: the Hard Parts?” It’s a tenuous subject, but we’re tackling it in this issue of Journey Magazine. My top picks would include Matthew 10:14.

The phrase seems harsh and—in all fairness—has a destructive potential for mismanagement by Christians. But it’s used three other times in the New Testament (Mark 6:11; Luke 9:5; Acts 13:51); so to just overlook it isn’t wise. As usual, we need to dig into the context of the phrase to get an idea of what was going on in Jesus’ day and how His directive applies to us today. Let’s look, for example, at the context of Acts 13:51.

The Greek idiom of shaking the dust off one’s feet equates to our idea of “washing our hands of something.” Figuratively, it indicates a person has—prayerfully, humbly, sincerely and without pride or malice—done all that can be done in a spiritually dangerous situation, he or she carries no further responsibility for it. In other words, the situation is placed in God’s hands.

That’s a mighty hard part of Scripture to carry out right there.

And yet the apostle Paul exemplifies masterfully in Acts 13 that this practice makes a Scriptural statement of finality about people who have been given the truth of the Gospel and recklessly reject it.

During their first missionary endeavor, Paul and Barnabas stop to preach in Antioch where some of the Jewish leaders stir up false accusations and incite persecution against them. As a result, the missionaries are expelled from the region. So Paul and Barnabas “shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium” (Acts 13:51).

The result? Antioch unwisely chose not to welcome the Gospel, but that didn’t keep the message from spreading to other areas. Paul and Barnabas had done all they were sent to do, and the responsibility now lay on the shoulders of those in Antioch. The apostles had proclaimed the truth of Christ boldly. Some residents accepted it with eagerness; others rejected it with violence

akin to what we sadly see in Western culture today. But the apostles were not responsible for the level of acceptance with which the Gospel message was received; they were responsible only for their own obedience to God by delivering the message.

That same principle applies to you and me today. We face situations in society where God calls us to stand firm, proclaim truth, be a steady witness. And sometimes we need to continue there until we see the results of that testimony. Other times, though, God gives us the freedom to move on. We “shake the dust off our feet” today when, under the Holy Spirit’s direction, we surrender those people who reject Him to the Lord and emotionally turn loose of the situation. At that point, we’re given the freedom to move into the next phase of ministry.

Jesus’ instruction to “shake the dust off our feet” reminds us that—like the early apostles—we are responsible for our obedience to God, not for the consequences of that obedience.



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Is the Bible Reliable and Spiritually Beneficial?

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

Christian leader James Kennedy, Ph.D. (1930-2007), said that the Bible is not a textbook about religion but a book of “God’s self-revelation to mankind.” That is an excellent description—through the pages of Scripture we learn definitive answers to three very important questions:

- Does God exist?
- What kind of God exists?
- How may I know this God who exists?

Imagine how “in the dark” humanity would be if not for what God has disclosed for us in the Bible? We would not know solid truth about creation (our origin), the fall and sin (humanity’s problem), or the world’s ethnicities (descending from Shem, Ham, and Japheth). We couldn’t understand today’s problems of peace in the Middle East (see Genesis 12-16 for insight); humans wouldn’t have objective knowledge about the nature of marriage and family; and we certainly wouldn’t have the hope of salvation from the One who said, “Search the Scriptures, for they testify of Me” (John 5:39).

In short, without the Bible we would know neither where we came from (origin), why we’re here (purpose), nor

where history is headed (destiny). Many a skeptic would quickly assert that they don’t need the Bible as a roadmap for life or preparation for final judgment. But it should be pointed out that countless doubters have become believers after looking at the evidence *for* the Bible and seriously reading the content *of* the Bible. Truth has a way of doing that; when we’re teachable and are truly seeking, the truths received bring our lives into conformity with reality.

The Bible’s historical accuracy has been amply determined. Evidence has been found on rock inscriptions, walls, statues, obelisks, pavement slabs, clay tablets, papyrus rolls, coins, seals, and pottery. Over 5,000 archaeological findings have confirmed the Bible’s historical accuracy. This fact should give us confidence in the truth of Scripture.

Cornelius Van Til, Ph.D. (1895-1987) was a Princeton-educated scholar who also happened to be a devoted believer in Jesus Christ. Van Til was no fundamentalist firebrand prone to over-the-

top statements; he was quite the opposite. But as he observed the secularism and skepticism growing in the mid-20th Century, he noted that man’s rejection of the Bible and its ethical standards was due to “hatred of the living God.”

That’s a pretty harsh accusation. But while other religions teach that mankind is inherently good, the Bible presents man to be inherently evil, sinful, and—without Jesus—hopeless. This unique message of the Bible is, to some, revolting.

While the Bible is unquestionably the world’s best-selling book, it is also true that no book has been as critiqued nor more despised. The Bible carries powerful messages about a God to Whom we are accountable. And though the Bible describes salvation through Jesus Christ as available to all, it also warns of everlasting punishment for those who reject Him.

None of us should be content to live while believing things that are false. And none who have met the Son of God through the Word of God should sit idly by while those we care about live and die apart from knowledge of salvation.



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When Mercy and Truth Crash

Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other. (Psalm 85:10)

We've all been there. Tensions rise over an "issue" in your church, school or family. People take sides. Some fly the flag of Mercy (a.k.a. Grace or Love) while others carry the banner of Truth (a.k.a. Holiness or Justice). Perhaps you're in the middle of a debate on social issues such as gay identity, marriage and ordination. Or you may be wrestling with theological issues like eternal judgment for non-believers.

We naturally react out of our personal sensibilities. Grace people instinctively show mercy to those who are hurt. They are advocates for the marginalized. Truth people have an unflinching commitment to morality, discipline and truth. They tell it like it is and let the chips fall where they land. Both sides have Scriptural support, but they collide predictably over emerging issues every time.

Here's the problem when we are acting out of our instincts: Our human natures are not perfectly tuned to God's nature. Our mercy can be taint-

ed by being spineless, short-sighted, self-serving, and people-pleasing. Our convictions about truth can mingle with disengaged, self-righteous and myopic judgmentalism. One extreme has no backbone while the other has no empathy. And neither is authentically Biblical—or God-like—by itself.

Is this an insolvable conundrum? Must Mercy and Truth always collide?

The answer, ironically, is in the greatest collision of all time—the Cross. There God's perfect love and perfect justice are on dramatic timeless display, together. To quote the psalmist, "Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed." (Psalm 85:10)

The Bible reveals a God who is more loving and merciful than anyone can fathom and more holy and just than anyone can comprehend. Our journey

into God's Word is a journey into the heart of God where these qualities are eternally compatible, united and balanced. God is not 50% grace and 50% truth. Rather, these qualities are only fully expressed when they are in this creative tension with each other. Mercy requires truth and truth requires mercy. Unless they are "kissing" we're probably leaning too much on our own understanding.

Here's a final caveat: A God-like balance isn't appreciated by those who are playing a zero-sum, all-or-nothing game with God's attributes. Trying to be a church that is pro-heterosexual-marriage-for-life and pro-life while also offering effective same-sex attraction, divorce, and post-abortion care invites criticism from both sides. To keep your bearings, you'll need a Biblical compass and just the right amount of indifference to public opinion.



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The Journey of Life, Loss, and God's Love

There is a time for everything under the sun. A time to be born and a time to die...a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance. (Ecclesiastes 3:2,4)

We treasure times of new beginnings, happy endings, laughter, love, and the fulfillment of longings. As a familiar chorus states, “Celebrate good times!” Indeed! These delights and highlights of life are precious and to be treasured. Simultaneously, as Solomon stated, living will be accompanied by loss: loss of dreams, health, finances, relationships, and painfully, loss of loved ones, and life. These losses can bring gripping pain, confusion, hurt and hopelessness, depression and deep despair. Grief may turn us towards God in anger, and in turn away from God as we question His goodness, love, trustworthiness, character, and Word.

If you or someone you know, is experiencing deep grief and loss, you may find strength, and possibly a measure of hope, in the following:

1 God is good *and* life will bring both blessings and brokenness; sweetness and sorrow. In the account of Job, Job proclaimed God's

precious provisions: “You gave me life and showed me kindness, and in your providence watched over my spirit” (Job 10:12). Job proclaimed facts about God that steadied his head and heart during a time of great tragedy and loss.

It is essential in each season of life to stand firm upon the fact that God is good, loving, kind, and cares deeply for each of us; even though circumstances may not readily reflect these facts.

2 As life brings unexpected and undesirable circumstances and outcomes, God invites us to draw near to Him. Psalm 119 states that God is the God of all comfort; the One who sustains us. It is His desire to be our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble (Psalm 46:10). Drawing near to God may stir conflicted emotions; yet it is in drawing near to Him, and the promises in His Word, that we will find comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

3 In seasons of grief and loss, embrace personal time to grieve, pray, cry, wrestle, rest, and lay your heart before the Lord. Resist the temptation to become isolated: reach out to a select few who are wise, caring, and trustworthy for comfort, counsel, prayer, and support (Genesis 37:35; 1 Chronicles 7:22; 2 Corinthians 1:4). Be where you are emotionally, but don't walk it out alone.

4 Psalm 23 declares that God walks with us through each season of life and loss. He has not left us (Deuteronomy 31:6). When we are gripped by grief and pain inhabits our hearts, time may seem to stand still. Each day, invite God to be your strength (Isaiah 40:29), and to guide your steps (Psalm 32:8). In His timing He will heal wounds, renew strength, restore hope, and bring beauty from the ashes of sorrow (Isaiah 55, Romans 8:28).



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When Scripture Doesn't Seem to Make Sense



Did God really say...? (Genesis 3:1)

Did God really command genocide? Does the Old Testament condone polygamy? How can I know the right interpretation of the Bible?

Significant questions like these will arise—whether you're reading through the Bible for the first time, or you've been in the church all your life but are doubting some of the truths you were taught as a child.

I want to encourage you not to avoid these hard questions about Scripture. Because the Bible is God's Word, there is nothing to fear in digging deeper.

Although there may be times when you'll have to confess "I don't know," here are some simple tips for how to approach the Bible when it doesn't seem to make sense.

1 Look at the context. When a verse doesn't line up with what you expect, the first thing to do is to read the passage in the context of the chapter, then in light of the message of the book, and finally in the context of the Bible as a whole. This is a good

practice even with passages that *do* make sense to you.

2 Interpret personal experience in light of Scripture, not the other way around. Personal experience can attest to the validity of the truth in our hearts, but it does *not* establish or create truth. When something in Scripture doesn't make sense to us, we can assume it is due to a deficiency in our own understanding rather than a deficiency in the Bible.

3 The Bible doesn't necessarily condone what it describes. We should only treat biblical examples as prescriptive if they are supported by a command. For example, many struggle with the abundant presence of polygamy and adultery in the Old Testament. However, just because many people in the Old Testament practiced these things does not mean the Bible condones them. In fact, the Old Testament condemns these practices elsewhere (e.g., Genesis 2:24; Exodus 20:14).

4 Scripture is the best interpreter of itself. Use the clearer parts of Scripture to interpret the less clear, the explicit parts to interpret the implicit, the doctrinal parts to interpret the historical, and the whole of Scripture to interpret the parts.

5 Take the Bible's meaning at face value. How can we know the right interpretation of the Bible when varying interpretations abound? We must remember that although Scripture has many *applications*, it has only one correct *interpretation*. Since God intends us to understand His Word, we should by default take the Bible's meaning in its plain and ordinary sense (unless the context demands otherwise). You would be surprised at how much agreement there is between Christians who share this common-sense approach.

These tips may not answer every question for you, but they will give you an idea of how to approach the difficult parts of Scripture for yourself. Nothing can replace the practice of firsthand investigation. If you are reading the Bible sincerely, you *will* have questions. That's okay! When you prayerfully struggle through these difficult questions, God will often deepen your conviction and settle the truths of Scripture in your heart.



KEN BOA

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Hold Yourself Accountable — Through Others

Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy. (Proverbs 27:6 NLT)

Every morning I see him, alone in the mist and standing apart from the rest in the pasture at the end of our road. Watchful; almost aloof; like a sentry in his place when all is well. Always sniffing the air and listening for any sense of danger. Although his lines are tall and straight, he is a most unlikely hero. He is a “guard donkey;” you’ll see him with cows or sheep throughout our mountains.

When I first noticed a donkey in a pasture with cows it seemed completely out of place until I learned why he was there. Even though the donkey isn’t really a friend to the cows and their calves, he is handy to have around because of his exceptional hearing, keen sense of smell, and aggressive disposition towards dogs, coyotes, foxes and most anything else that comes along. When an intruder is detected, the donkey brays, bites, chases, and kicks to protect its territory and the other animals in the pasture.

This picture reminds me of so many real-life situations—pastor and flock; coach and team; an officer and his men. But on the most practical level it’s about friends—having some-

one in your life that cares enough to come running when you’re in danger; someone who knows you well, is willing to say what needs to be said when necessary, whether you want to hear it or not. Stubborn, committed, intensely focused, and sincere—are all attributes of the guard donkey *and* a good, solid friend.

But most of us live our lives alone; we have some friends, but few really know us well. Furthermore, few would be willing—or feel they have permission—to confront us if there were obvious or not-so-obvious blindspots in our lives that ought to be addressed.

These kinds of relationships aren’t easy to build; to be honest, sometimes they can be awkward, perhaps even confrontational. You must get to know someone—really know them—before you’re willing to “allow them” to speak into your life.

But I speak from experience when I say it’s worth the work to get there. I’m glad to say I have some guys like

that in my life. Guys I could call in the dead of night. Guys who would be willing to be honest and stubborn enough to “kick me” if I needed it. In most cases, I’m “that guy” in their lives too. Proverbs 27:6 points out the importance of a good friend:

“Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy.” (NLT)

How about you? Do you have friends in your life you can count on to call you on “stuff”? To “bray, bite, chase, kick” when you need it most? If not, ask yourself why; then get busy developing good solid friendships. It may be the best investment you’ll ever make.

Numbers 22:21ff really brings this point home. God uses a donkey to help Balaam see the error of his way. Take a moment to read that chapter again so you will be prepared to listen to others when you should. And then be kinder to the “donkeys” in your life when they reluctantly speak up!



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The Word: Our Repair Kit

...let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. (1 John 3:18)

We have a goal to visit the countries that represent the 15 languages our book, *Men Are Like Waffles, Women Are Like Spaghetti*, has been translated into. Because of our desire to cross cultures, we have often been accompanied by translators. Wouldn't it be nice if we could each have a marital translator? Someone who steps in when we are misunderstanding each other? Good news: the Holy Spirit can be that translator! No one knows your mate like God, so the whisper of the Spirit can help you look past misstatements or poorly-worded sentences into the heart of your spouse's intent. We credit the Spirit for repairing our hearts so we can love each other well. We each come from dysfunctional homes that pack our lives with some unhealthy baggage. The Spirit helps us keep what is healthy, and dispose of what is toxic. The Spirit teaches us to love!

Love gives the benefit of the doubt. The Apostle Paul says in Philippians 1:7: "It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart." *In my heart* means you carry the person "inside" in a way that is "open minded." When the Apostle Paul wrote this he was complimenting his friends. "... Paul praised them for their concern...[1]

That is a good place to be in a marriage:

- **CONCERNED** for the other
- **CARRYING** the other
- **COMPLIMENTING** the other

When you carry each other on your heart, you assume the best about each other and your words. When you quit carrying your mate "on your heart," it becomes all about behavior. The problem with a behavior-based relationship is that no one can behave well enough for long enough to keep a relationship going just on perfect behavior.

Next time your feelings are hurt over specific words, go a little deeper and do these simple steps to help love L.A.S.T:

Look to the heart of your spouse. What does he or she have on his or her heart concerning you? Have you prayed and asked God for insight? You cannot judge motives, so have you calmly asked your mate to reword his or her comment? (Your spouse might do better with a second opportunity to reveal intentions).

Assume your spouse is concerned for your best interest. Have you

stopped to look beyond the fumbled words or upset attitude to see if your mate was attempting to be kind, generous, willing, or co-operative? Have you looked at the situation assuming your mate meant the best for you and your relationship? Have you asked God to help you see your relationship from a more heaven-sent viewpoint?

Speak assuring words. Have you tried a gentle answer? Or have you tried speaking something peaceful or calming like, "I know we will get through this together"? Have you prayed and asked God to help you be creative in your conversation?

Thank your spouse for having a history of loving you. Have you verbally pointed out successes of your love story? Have you asked God to help you remember the moments your spouse has tried his or her best to love you? Speak words of gratitude, thankfulness and appreciation.

[1] Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary: An exposition of the Scriptures* (Php 1:7). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.



PAM & BILL FARREL

Marriage relationship experts and bestselling authors of over fifty books. Web: Love-Wise.com

Three Places to Turn When Your Heart Shuts Down



But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (John 14:26)

Some things you'll never get *over*, but you *will* get through.

If that thought does not resonate with you on a personal level, you indeed are numbered among the few. Life is tough and the circumstances that threaten to take us under can leave us feeling overwhelmed and unable to process.

As God's daughters we may go through those times of feeling utterly helpless, but we are never hopeless!

God Himself is living within us and making it possible to triumphantly get through every unsettling season of life. Here are three realities in which I place my trust when troubling circumstances threaten to take me under.

1 Jesus understands my broken heart. On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus cried out to His Father: *My soul is crushed by sor-*

row, even to the point of death (Mark 14:34 NLB). No one understands the depths of human suffering better than God does. He never dismisses my pain, but calls me to run to Him when I can't take it anymore. In the total humanity of Jesus as He lived life on this earth, He gets it. Because He is also totally God, He alone can get me through.

2 God will guide me through His Spirit. *But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you* (John 14:26 CSB). Stress can fill your mind with confusion. How wonderful knowing that you have a Counselor who will speak to you, guiding you with promptings in your spirit. He will also remind you of previous victories when God saw you through tough times. Recognizing His presence living inside of me quiets my troubled heart and reminds me of God's constant companionship and guidance.

3 God gives me prayer language through His Word. When my mind becomes distracted and overrun by anxiety, I have discovered the safest and most "accurate" way to pray is to pray Scripture. I can confidently know that when I pray God's

Word back to Him, I am praying in accordance with His Will. Seeking direction for a decision I must make often prompts me to personalize a prayer based on Psalm 32:8.

Lord, Your Word says that You will instruct me and teach me in the way I should go. You will counsel me with Your loving eye upon me. Thank You Lord, for I rest in this promise.

When those times of emotional gridlock shut you down and you can't seem to pray or read your Bible, God will run to you! You are His child and He is your Rescuer!

I will never (under any circumstances) desert you (nor give you up nor leave you without support, nor will I in any degree leave you helpless), nor will I forsake or let you down or relax My hold on you (assuredly not)! (Hebrews 13:5 AMP)



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God Calls Whom He Will

Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” (1 Samuel 3:10)

Some calls change our lives forever. One call—in audible yet truly clear—came when I was thirteen years old. I didn’t understand its meaning, but over the years I never forgot it. There were days it tugged at my heart; there were years I kept it in the recesses of my memory. In my thirties, that same call repeated itself deep in my soul. My mind and my schedule made excuses to push it away, but not so far that it disappeared. Finally, a decade later, after arguing with the Caller about my abilities and unworthiness, I found myself with head bowed, tears forming a puddle on the floor, releasing everything I had used as an excuse to answer God’s call to serve the Lord in full time ministry.

Three years later, I found myself as a seminary graduate standing in the pulpit. Negative messages about women being silent in the church pursued me. Louder, however, was the voice of the One who called me to that pulpit. It calmed my anxious heart and flooded my soul. Through almost 25 years since that moment standing with God in that pulpit, I have been challenged numer-

ous times about those same questions that brought anxiety and fear. At one point I prayed, “God, I know You called me and have equipped me to bring Your message, but how do I lovingly respond to those who doubt?” What I came to realize is that it was not my “battle” to pursue. When God calls us, whether it is to full time ministry or servanthood in another area, what God seeks is our obedience.

Examining 1 Corinthians 14 *in its context* we find that Paul (who is most often used to invalidate women in ministry) wrote to clarify issues within the Corinthian church. Female converts coming from the Greek culture—with cultic and gnostic beliefs and generally not being educated—were speaking out, interrupting the teachers and prophets, trying to understand but disrupting the orderly worship.

In 1 Timothy 2, the issues in the Ephesian church with the women were inappropriate attire, behaviors and false teachings brought from pagan traditions including goddess worship. Paul was correcting their abuse of false teachings and giving Timothy ways to fix the problems. As with any false teachings, Paul told Timothy to

silence the source and told false teachers to listen and learn the truth.

It is so important to read Scripture in its context. In Galatians 3:28, Paul wrote there are neither male nor female. It is clear that he didn’t mean different genders no longer exist, but that *in Christ*—whether we are Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female—it doesn’t matter; we are all new creations with new hearts, new gifts for ministry, and a new love to live in peace with one another.

What we learn from Scripture is that Jesus came to bring an inclusive message of love and that God values each one of us.

Sometimes we do not totally understand who God calls to fulfill His purposes here on earth. God calls whom He will. My desire as a woman in ministry is to be obedient to His call.



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How Should Children Learn Their Bodies are Temples?

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Recently, my son confided in me that a girl asked him to be her boyfriend. I knew this day was coming, but I was not prepared for it. My daughter has expressed that there is a cute boy in the neighborhood. These are normal feelings and actions of children during the preteen years.

As our children grow, so grows our responsibility to teach them what God says regarding our bodies. As our country strives to confuse our children—with mandated sex education in our schools, adding alternative lifestyle characters in their favorite shows, and the rise of social media—we must stand upon the truth of God’s Word.

In 1 Corinthians 6:19, Paul reminds us that “our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you.” He goes on to say that our bodies are not our own, and that we were bought with the blood of Christ.

How is Our Body a Temple?

God resides in our bodies just as He took up residence in the temple when

the Israelites were wandering in the desert. His residence in us through the Holy Spirit is what makes our bodies a temple. We are to use our bodies as a form of worship.

Children can understand this idea better only if they see us as an example. Parenting is all about setting a positive example for our children to follow. They need to see mothers and fathers who don’t complain about their bodies, but rather show them respect. Genesis 1:26-27 says that God created man in His image. How wonderful to know we are perfectly made in the image of God.

As my children are reaching a stage in life where their bodies will change, it is important for their dad and me to remind them that no matter what changes are happening, they are still created in the image of God. They are still beautiful and handsome. Ultimately, God is looking at their hearts. He is more concerned about what the inside looks like than the outside.

What can Parents do to Encourage Their Children?

Teaching our children about their bodies is simply hard. For some parents, it can be a little embarrassing. Rather than sitting down and having a one-time conversation, we should create a home environment that centers around an ongoing discussion regarding our bodies. Children need to feel free to ask questions as they arise. We should not try to answer all the questions at once.

Reading God’s Word with our children is important as well. Emphasize Scriptures such as Romans 12:1-2 in family devotional times. Remind your children that their body is a living sacrifice to God. We must allow God to set the standard of bodily worthiness in our lives, not the secular world.

Most importantly, parents must pray for their children. Prayer is the most powerful tool you have. Pray for a feeling of worthiness in our children. Pray for them to love who they are in Christ.



ASHLEY HOOKER

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God the Gardener

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)

The green thumb possessed by my late mother and my late paternal aunt eludes me. Scampering up trees, adventuring in creeks and hiding away with books were more appealing. I regret not getting my hands dirty alongside them. It was a missed opportunity to experience the full meaning of God as a Gardener.

The Cosmic Gardener

Genesis 1 witnesses the expansive nature of God as a cosmic Gardener. His creative Spirit breathed upon void and chaos. In their place came life and order, along with design to sustain it (Genesis 1:11-12): sands deep in the sea, loam (a fertile mixture of silt, sand and clay), dark and spongy peat. Here was blessed fertility, food and beauty. He charged the man and the woman to watch over it as under-gardeners (Genesis 1:28-30). They were to continue cultivating His creation—by breaking up the soil, planting, watering and harvesting.

After the fall, God includes the ground in judgement: “Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it...both thorns and thistles it shall

grow for you” (see Genesis 3:17-18). In sweat and hunger, plenty and famine, there is a constant reminder of what humanity lost.

The Redemptive Gardener

In Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23, Jesus likened the life-giving Word of God to seeds sown on various soils: the barren pathways where birds could find an easy meal, rocks lightly dusted with soil where roots could not flourish, ground filled with thorns choking off growth. Yet there was the receptive soil—prepared by seasons of breaking up, removing rocks and thorns, planting and supplying water. This bountiful ground yielded up to a hundred times more.

Jesus pointed to the tiny mustard seed and declared the Kingdom of God was like it—small when sown but larger than all other garden plants at maturity (Mark 4:30-32).

In his final days Jesus likened His coming passion to a single grain of wheat, which buried in the ground, would bring life. After the cross, the Redemptive Gardener would likewise

contribute to the earth. On the third day, new and eternal life burst out in and through Him.

The Mastering Gardener

Jesus’ promised Spirit came rushing into the upper room on Pentecost, burning away the old so the new could come (see John 14:26, 2 Corinthians 5:17). Out of the building these new creations ran—into the streets, sowing truth in heart soils from all over the Roman Empire. The Master Gardener cultivated three thousand new plantings that day, the beginning of the Abrahamic promise of blessing all the nations (see Genesis 12:3b). This will culminate in the reaping: a harvest of peoples in the worship in Heaven of “a great multitude...from every nation and *all* tribes and peoples and tongues” (Revelation 7:9).

The Spirit of God is the Mastering Gardener in this time between the first fruits of Pentecost and the final, glorious celebration. He continually labors with the Word to train us to be faithful and fruitful under-gardeners.



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It All Matters

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16)

What if I only talked to you when you discussed topics that interested me? Have you heard something that sounded unbelievable or awful until you found out the context in which it happened or was said? We could take a single phrase or statement and reach one conclusion. When words immediately preceding or following it are brought to light, we might find the meaning is quite different than it first seemed.

If we only read select parts of the Bible, it can be like reading only the middle of a letter a close friend sent us. If we skip parts that seem hard, we might miss the prophecy of restoration and hope in Ezekiel, the friendship of David and Jonathan, and Hosea's marriage symbolizing God's relationship with Israel. Does it change my perspective of God and my place in His plan to know that He can work through adulterers, murderers, prostitutes, people that battled depression, and people that ran from God?

Recently, when taking a relative to the emergency room, I told the doctor all of the symptoms I could and as much

health background as I could. Why? One symptom alone might indicate a myriad of possible causes. However, in the context of the bigger picture, the possible root of the problem might be narrowed considerably. In a similar way, it is crucial to take the whole context of God's relationship with humanity revealed through His Word into account and not just the pieces we like. It helps us understand the broader view.

Do parts of the Scriptures seem boring or not relevant to life today? If we skip parts of the Old Testament, we might not learn about prophecies that were already fulfilled. Listings of ancestral lines show us that Jesus came to us through the family line foretold by the prophets.

The hard parts of Scripture also serve to remind us that God's thoughts are higher than ours and that we can not fully know the mind of God.

If we read the parts of the Bible we find difficult, we will be better equipped to answer questions that someone might

ask about things they have heard about the Bible. The Holy Spirit will give us the words to say when we talk with someone who does not believe. Even if we don't know the answer, won't it give us more credibility if we can truthfully say we have read and studied that part?

Doesn't it make sense that the more of the Scriptures we read and study the more we will understand the character of God? Isn't the Bible God's love letter to humans? If so, wouldn't it be a great idea to read the whole letter?

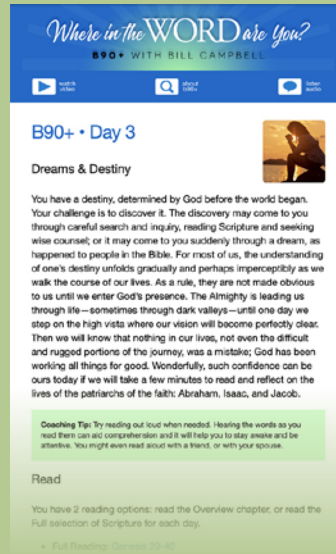
Dear Lord, help us to hunger for more of You and to hunger for Your Word. Guide us and remind us that You are with us and will speak to us through Your Word. Please reveal to us the meaning of the hard parts of Scripture as we seek to know You more. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing can make them stumble. Psalm 119:165



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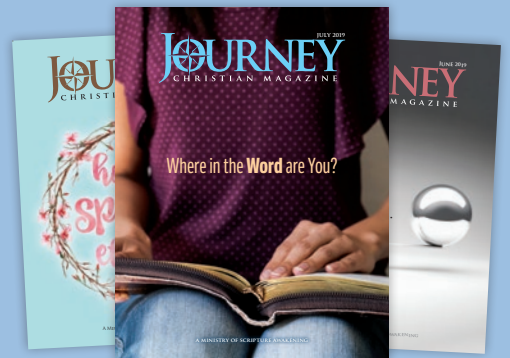
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