

# READING THE WORD



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A REVISION STUDY FROM  
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

*Reading the Word*

Reading the Word  
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The Fellowship of Ailbe

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## Welcome to *Reading the Word*

Reading the Bible is the starting-point for having the Word of Christ dwell in you richly – the joy and rejoicing of your heart.

But reading the Bible daily, with understanding, and for obedience is a *discipline*. It must be learned and practiced with as much diligence as taking our meals, doing our work, or keeping up our health and hygiene. In our day, many Christians are not attending to this discipline as they should, and they and their churches are in danger of drifting from the true faith into a form of “near Christianity” – which is no Christianity at all.

We need to make sure we’re doing the best possible job of feeding on the Scriptures. If we will, we may expect the blessings of God to flow to and through us, with joy and rejoicing all around.

*ReVision* studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We’re happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you’ll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore  
Principal

## 1 Read Regularly

*These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Acts 17:11*

### *A subtle shift*

We need to say a bit more about the importance of *reading* the Bible. Reading the Bible is the starting-point for having the Word of God dwell in us richly. So we need to get this right and keep it right if we're going to know the joy and rejoicing that come from feeding regularly on the Word of the Lord.

Over the previous generation, a subtle shift has been occurring among certain students of the Bible concerning how to read and benefit from the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. The founders of the modern evangelical movement, that post-World War II generation of pastors and theologians, understood the Bible to be the Word of God, faithful, reliable, true, authoritative, and inerrant in all it asserts. It is to be received and read so that it dwells in us richly, and obeyed as the final authority in all matters of faith and practice.

In making this commitment, our evangelical forebears were doing nothing more than restating what faithful Christians have believed in all generations.

The second generation of evangelical leaders reaffirmed this commitment to the final authority and utter reliability of Scripture in the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. There the heirs of the modern evangelical movement declared, "The authority of Scripture is a key issue for the Christian church in this and every age. Those who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are called to show the reality of their discipleship by humbly and faithfully obeying God's written Word. To stray from Scripture in faith or conduct is disloyalty to our Master. Recognition of the total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its authority."

But now, in the third and the early years of the fourth generation of the evangelical movement, while the old commitment to the inerrancy and authority of the Bible remains in place, at least intellectually, a dramatically new *view* of the Bible has brought forth an *approach to understanding* Scripture that is having the effect of *undermining* the teaching of Scripture in its entirety.

### *Scripture as palette*

Among certain preachers and teachers in our day, the Scriptures have come to be regarded more like an artist's palette than like the rules for making art. The various "colors" of Scripture are there for the artist to select and combine in painting out his own unique view of the world, and, taking this approach, he can claim that he has drawn such a view from the Scriptures. For one who approaches Scripture this way, his use of the Bible is determined, not by the teaching of Scriptures, but by his view of the world. Scripture is a palette for painting out one's beliefs; we turn to it to endorse our preconceived ideas, which are very often shaped more by the spirit of the age than the Spirit of God.

As bad as this practice is – and it is everywhere and increasing (we'll have more to say about this in a later installment in this series) – what's even worse is that the people of God, who ought to be searching the Scriptures daily to discern the truth or falsity of what they're hearing, are allowing their own reading and study of Scripture to fall by the wayside. Because we aren't reading the Bible as faithfully as we should, we are susceptible to being pulled away from the Bible by those who claim to be teaching it to us.

This is a form of *wrong reading* of the Scriptures – failing to read them consistently, deeply, reflectively, and with a view to *obedience*. You are reading the Scriptures wrong if you simply hear what someone tells you about

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“what the Scriptures say” and, because you happen to agree – or disagree – with the view being espoused, confirm or reject it accordingly. This is not what the Bereans did. They heard Paul readily. But then, in their synagogues, homes, and among friends, they searched the Scriptures daily to determine whether what they were hearing was true. We are reading Scripture *wrong* if we are not reading it daily, and listening as it speaks to us about all of life.

The Bereans were people who took Scripture seriously, and they were not about to embrace any teaching that did not conform to what Word of God revealed.

### *Scripture as spiritual food*

Scripture is not an artist’s palette for clever interpreters with preconceived notions about things true and good, to paint whatever they believe on the canvas of their ministries. Scripture likens itself to food, food for the rejoicing of the soul, and we must partake of *all* the counsel of God in Scripture in ways that find us going *ever more deeply* into the Word to gain the nourishment we need. As our minds grow in understanding the revelation of God, we bring our hearts, consciences, and lives into line with what *God* intends. We do not simply pick and choose from Scripture to support something we believe, no matter how sincerely or passionately.

*Right* reading of Scripture begins with daily reading and meditation, and regular study of the Word with serious, like-minded students. Set a time to read daily. You may need to get up a little earlier or stay up later at night. Or perhaps give up something you’re doing now to feed on the Word of God, consistently every day. Find a place to read – quiet, isolated, and one that will encourage reflection. Select a version of Scripture that reads well to you, and make sure you give yourself to such right reading every day. Find some study partners and begin holding one another accountable for right reading of the Word of God.

You will be vulnerable to the false teachings of well-meaning but wrong-headed Bible teachers if you are not daily and regularly reading and searching the Scriptures for yourself. If you are reading the Bible *wrong* in this regard, there’s no time like the present to begin reading *right*.

### *For reflection*

1. Why do you think the discipline of daily Bible reading, meditation, and study has come to be neglected, or used sparingly, by many Christians?
2. Imagine that you are trying to encourage a new Christian to take up the discipline of daily Bible reading. What points would you make to persuade him of the importance of doing so?
3. Meditate on 2 Timothy 3.15-17. Why was Scripture given? How does it do its work?

*Next steps – Preparation: On a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 indicates “Daily, Deeply, Obediently”, how would you assess your practice of reading the Scriptures at this time? Why did you choose that number? Share your answers with a Christian friend, and begin praying for one another about becoming better students of God’s Word.*

## 2 Read It All

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable... 2 Timothy 3.16*

### *Most necessary*

*The Westminster Confession of Faith*, an acknowledged source of Biblical and theological guidance since 1648, offers a concise statement concerning the importance of the Scriptures. *The Confession* states, “it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His Church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing: which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary...”

The Westminster divines were here only reflecting the opinion of the Church in every age, that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are “most necessary” to comfort, strengthen, and protect the Church of Jesus Christ against corrupting influences from without and within. Without a solid grounding in the Word of God, believers are vulnerable to every passing “wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4.14). They are susceptible to being blown off course in their journey of faith, and in danger of shipwrecking their faith on the rocks of false teaching.

This is why it is so important that believers establish the practice of daily reading, meditation, and study in the Bible. Increasingly, pastors and church leaders are employing a hermeneutic of convenience to allow them to embrace doctrines and practices which cannot be supported from the whole counsel of God in Scripture. And they are leading multitudes of believers into a pattern of drift, away from the Lord and His Word, into another gospel and misguided Christian faith. Unless we are faithfully reading, meditating on, and studying God’s Word, we will be vulnerable to being led astray from the path of evangelical orthodoxy into a form of “near Christianity” that is, in fact, no Christianity at all.

We are reading the Scriptures wrong if we aren’t reading them regularly, and if we aren’t daily searching the Scriptures to understand the good and perfect will of God for our lives.

### *“All Scripture...”*

Paul is emphatic that our reading and study of the Bible should not be piecemeal, hunt-and-peck, but comprehensive. He insisted that *all* Scripture is the very Word of God. He considered it important that his own study and teaching should take into consideration “all the counsel of God” in Scripture (Acts 20.27). A survey of the quotes and allusions to the Old Testament in Paul’s letters reveals his ease and skill in moving throughout what was then the Bible in presenting his case for the Gospel of the Kingdom and the life of faith.

Paul commanded those who read his epistles to imitate him as he imitated Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 11.1). I take this to mean, with respect to our subject, that we who follow in the footsteps of Paul and Jesus should be good students of the whole Bible. It’s not enough to read, meditate, and study portions the Word of God with some regularity. We need to make sure, if we want to ready the Word rightly, that we are becoming increasingly familiar with and immersed in all the sections and books of the Bible.

In other words, we need to make *all* of Scripture the focus of our daily reading, meditation, and study. We won’t do this if all we ever read are those favorite, familiar stories, passages, or books. We won’t do this if our reading is guided exclusively by one of the many excellent devotional guides available through various ministries. These don’t always take readers systematically through the whole Scripture, and they can lead us to become more dependent on the *commentary* on the text than on the *text* itself.

## *Reading the Word*

There is no substitute for daily reading, meditation, and study in *all* the counsel of God, the whole Bible, *all* of Scripture. So, how can we do this?

### *A reading plan*

The best way to make sure that you will grow in all the counsel of God is to follow a reading schedule that regularly takes you through the whole Bible. Guides are available, such as the [M'Cheyne Bible Reading Plan](#), which can lead you in reading through the whole Bible in a year. The *One Year Bible* offers another approach to reading through the Bible in a year, with helpful breakdowns of your reading to make this a manageable effort. An interesting version of this is the *One Year Chronological Bible* which, in addition to taking you through the Bible in a year, arranges the readings to follow the chronological development of the redemptive plan of God in His Word.

Reading the Bible through in a year may be too ambitious for some of us. If you read two chapters of the Old Testament, one chapter from a gospel – Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John – and one chapter of the New Testament every day, you'll get through the whole Bible in about 18 months. During that time, you'll complete the Old Testament once, the New Testament three times, and each of the gospels about four times. By keeping the gospels in your daily reading, you will increase your ability to “see” Jesus in all the other parts of Scripture as well (Jn. 5.39).

You need a Bible reading plan that will take you consistently, over and over, through all the books of the Bible. *All* Scripture is the Word of God, inspired by the Spirit, and profitable for our comfort, strengthening, and protection. You will be reading the Scriptures wrong unless you read them all, and read them continuously, over and over and over again. This is the kind of *right* reading of God's Word that can keep us from being misled or short-changed in our faith.

### *For reflection*

1. What parts of Scripture do you find particularly interesting or helpful? Why?
2. What parts of Scripture do you find less interesting and less helpful? What is it about these parts of Scripture that cause you to feel this way?
3. Paul insists that all Scripture is inspired by God. Even the difficult or uninteresting parts. Suggest some ways you might overcome the difficulty of these parts of Scripture and begin to gain the “breath of God” they contain:

*Next steps – Transformation: Does your present Bible-reading plan take you through the whole Bible? Find a friend who will read through the Scriptures with you, using a plan agreeable to both of you. Meet frequently to discuss your progress and to share what you're learning from God's Word.*

### 3 A Delight, not a Duty

*So shall I keep Your law continually,  
Forever and ever.  
And I will walk at liberty,  
For I seek Your precepts.  
I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings,  
And will not be ashamed.  
And I will delight myself in Your commandments,  
Which I love.  
My hands also I will lift up to Your commandments,  
Which I love,  
And I will meditate on Your statutes.* Psalm 119.44-48

“Legalistic”?

I want to insist that you are reading the Scriptures wrong if you’re not reading them daily and comprehensively. You need a plan to help you develop the discipline of setting aside time each day to read, meditate in, and study the Word of God, and to do so in a way that takes you through the whole of Scripture, over and over again.

Perhaps this sounds a bit “legalistic” to you? I’ve been told as much by pastors and church leaders who believe that, if they take up such a “rigid discipline”, as they see it, they’ll just become like the Pharisees of old, doing their duty and checking off their list of good works to prove their righteousness.

Is daily, comprehensive reading of the life-giving, glory-revealing, power-wielding Word of God a mere *duty*? Are we being “legalistic” by insisting that we’re only reading Scripture rightly when we read it this way?

*It depends...*

Certainly, Bible reading can become a work of legalism by which we try to prove our “righteousness” and flaunt our presumed piety. But just because it *can* be this doesn’t mean that it *must* or that God intends it *should*.

What if, rather than being a mere *duty*, daily and comprehensive reading of God’s Word were to become a great *delight*? This, after all, was how the prophet Jeremiah saw his time in the Scriptures. He wrote, “Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart” (Jer. 15.16). Job, the greatest man of his day, said that he valued his time in the Word of God more than the meals he took three times a day (Job 23.12). Jesus acknowledged that depending on Scripture is more important than our bodily nutritional needs, as important as these truly are (Matt. 4.4). He certainly took great delight in all the counsel of God in Scripture.

So it depends on how we approach daily reading, meditating in, and studying the Word of God. If we approach it as a *duty*, something we *have* to do, then that’s what it will be. And as a *duty*, our discipline of reading will not yield the fruit of transforming grace God intends. Instead, it will only make us smug and self-righteous.

On the other hand, if we learn to *delight* in the Word and to *cherish* the time we have to read it, we’re likely to find, like Jeremiah and Job and Jesus, that these moments in the Word of God are the most important, most enjoyable moments of our day.

So how do we get to that mindset?

*Seek the Lord*

God is the Lord of the heart; He can shape our attitudes and affections when it comes to daily reading in His Word. If we will seek the Lord daily as we come to the Scriptures, looking to Him to help us delight in His Word, we can expect that He will do so, for this is His will for every one of us.

One way to do this is to let Psalm 119 be your prayer of preparation for the reading of God's Word. Psalm 119 is divided into 22 sections; the verses in each section begin with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet. If you read one section a day before beginning your Bible reading, using that section as your preparation prayer, you will find your own attitude increasingly lining up with God's desire for you concerning His Word.

The focus of Psalm 119 is on the Law of God; however, the Law and Word of God – that is, all of Scripture – are the same cloth. So as we pray our way through Psalm 119 a little more than once a month, we may expect God to shape our heart to delight in Him and all the Scriptures.

Consider just the text for today, the second half of the *vav* section of Psalm 119. It leads us to make a *commitment*, a decision of conscience and will, to keep what we are learning from God's Word. It teaches us to *seek* His Word, and thus to regard it as extremely important – like finding your lost car keys, for example. These verses lead us to anticipate growing *confidence* in the Word, and they encourage us to *delight* in reading, meditating, and studying it. The passage even puts us in the posture of a child, lifting our hands to our beloved Father, that He might take us up, draw us near, and hold us fast.

Pray like this every day before you read, and as you are reading, and you'll find your attitude toward daily and comprehensive reading of God's Word is becoming not a duty, but an increasing delight. And then you'll be reading the Word rightly, as you should.

*For reflection*

1. What are some of the differences between reading Scripture as a duty and reading it as a delight?
2. Can reading Scripture regularly and comprehensively be *both* a duty and a delight? Explain.
3. Suggest some additional ways of *preparing* for daily reading that might help you to take more delight in this discipline:

*Next steps – Preparation: Try our suggestion about praying Psalm 119 for the next several days. Pray the verses from Psalm 119 as though they were your own words. Pray them slowly, seriously, reflectively. Do you sense any change in your attitude toward your time in God's Word? Share your thoughts with your reading partner or a Christian friend.*

## 4 Read It *In*

*Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly...* Colossians 3.16

*Comfort, strength, and protection*

We're trying to learn what is involved in right reading of the Word of God, so that we can gain the promised comfort, strength, protection, and joy the Scriptures can supply.

So far we've seen that this means regular, daily reading, meditating, and study of the Bible. It also means *the whole Bible*, even those difficult or tedious parts, and that over and over again. At the same time, we need to be careful to approach this discipline with the right attitude, so we're going to let Psalm 119 lead and shape us as we prepare each day in prayer for the delights God has for us in His Word.

In other words, your reading of Scripture is wrong if it's not regular, comprehensive, and undertaken as a delight. If that's *not* where you are, then take heart! It's where you *can be* if you are willing to take up right reading of God's Word, following the guidelines we're suggesting in this series.

But we also need to guard against a merely *superficial* reading of Scripture – one that skims the words of the text, but doesn't really *drink them in*. David rejoiced that the Lord gave him to drink from the "river" of God's delights (Ps. 36.8, 9); like a "fountain of life", God quenched David's spiritual thirst by great draughts of the Word. As David drank God's Word *in* he was refreshed, renewed, and restored *in* his soul, and thus he was enabled to carry on in his calling and walk with the Lord.

*What's "in" there?*

As we have seen, Paul says that we are reading the Word right when we allow it to dwell *in* us richly. We want to drink the Word *in*, so that it cleanses, refreshes, and renews us *in our souls*, in that deep spiritual essence that determines everything else about our lives. As we read the Scriptures and meditate and study them, we want them to "go down" like a refreshing drink on a hot day, or like that first cup of coffee in the morning, tingling, refreshing, delighting, and renewing us deep within our souls.

But we should first make sure that we're acquainted with our souls. What's in the soul that we can expect the Scriptures to affect with spiritual refreshment and renewing? What is the soul, and how can understanding the soul lead us to be better readers of Scripture?

The soul consists of three distinct but interacting and overlapping spiritual entities – the mind, the heart, and the conscience. The mind gathers, sorts, and arranges our *thought* life. The heart nurtures and deploys the *affections*. And the conscience preserves our default *values*, guiding our *will* as it brings heart and mind together into action.

*Reading the Word "in"*

OK, so how do we let the Word of Christ "dwell in" these various components of the soul? How does the Word become so lodged in our soul that it becomes right at home there, and does its transforming work from the inside-out?

You may find it helpful to bring some additional effort into your reading, meditating, and studying by jotting down some of your reflections on the Scriptures. You might want to get a pen and some paper – or open a new notebook in your favorite computer program or app. This act of writing things down – or journaling, as some describe it – can deepen the impressions of what you're learning, helping you to sort out and combine the teaching of Scripture, and preparing you for another important aspect of right reading yet to be explained – what we have referred to as "reading to run."

## Reading the Word

As you're reading, ask yourself: What's the central *idea* or *truth* of this passage? What word or teaching is God impressing on me from this text? How does this want to *shape my thinking*? Now you're "drinking the Word" into your mind. Make a few notes under a heading such as, *Main Idea*.

At the same time, scour the text for any *affections* which may be suggested. Let it speak to you about feelings, attitudes, aspirations, hopes, and desires. In our text, to let the Word "dwell in" us suggests a *welcoming* attitude toward Scripture – a *ready receptivity* to the Word, being *delighted* to read and drink it in. Jot that down, and any other feelings, emotions, attitudes and the like that come out of your reading, all under a heading, *Primary Affections*.

Then, under the *Values* or *Priorities* heading, make a note concerning any priorities, values, or changes of will suggested by the text. The word "dwell in" makes a demand on your values and priorities. How will you fulfill that demand? Write it down!

The more you read Scripture with the components of your soul in mind – by focusing on your thought life, affections, values, and priorities as you read, and listening to how the Scriptures address these – and the more you write down and reflect on how the Scriptures are impressing your soul, the more the Word will come to dwell in you richly, and you'll be improving right reading of the Bible.

### *For reflection*

1. Discuss some ways that you have seen Scripture affect your mind – what you think, how you think, how you understand, your ideas about life, and so forth:
2. How about your heart? Has your regular reading of Scripture made any difference in your *affections* – the way you feel about people or things, your hopes and aspirations, your attitudes?
3. If you were asked to prepare a list of the five highest priorities indicated in Scripture, what would you list? Cite some Scripture to support your list:

*Next steps – Preparation: Try adding writing or journaling to your daily reading. Share some of the results of this with your reading partner or a Christian friend.*

## 5 Read It Together

*Then He said to them, "Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old." Matthew 13:52*

### *One Author, one story*

Because the Bible is divided into two primary sections – Old Testament and New Testament – readers can sometimes get the impression that these are two separate kinds of revelation, with different – and not always harmonious – meanings. So we sometimes hear people say, "Well, that was the *Old* Testament; this is the *New*." Or, "I'm not under Law; I'm under grace." Or even, "Yes, but that was the God of the *Old* Testament, and Jesus is the God of the *New*."

The result of this kind of bifurcated thinking is to diminish the power of Scripture and to obstruct the work of the Spirit of God as the primary Teacher of God's Word.

Paul says that the Spirit teaches us by comparing things from one part of Scripture with things from other parts (1 Cor. 2:12, 13). But if we insist on *opposing* the various parts of Scripture to one another, rather than on *reading them together*, we're going to miss a good deal of what God intends.

In reality, *one God* has given His Word, *one overarching narrative* directs all its various parts, *one Lord Jesus Christ* is the focal point of it all, and the sanctification of God's people unto lives of good works is the *one temporal aim* of the entire Bible. Thus, we should in our reading of Scripture, always seek ways of bringing together, rather than opposing, the Old Testament with the New, Law with grace, promises with commandments, and the deep mysteries of Scripture with those parts that are abundantly plain.

What do we need to become truly wise scribes who are trained for Kingdom living through our study and use of the whole counsel of God?

### *Embrace the big picture*

Studying the Bible is in many ways like putting a jigsaw puzzle together. You will struggle to assemble all those different parts if you don't have before you the picture you're supposed to be constructing. This is why we keep the puzzle box lid before us and assemble the frame of the puzzle first of all.

The same is true with the Bible. Unless we understand the big picture – the large, overarching narrative of Scripture – and its primary supportive themes, we're going to struggle trying to keep the whole together and to make sense of and benefit from its several parts.

So what is the story of the Bible? We can answer that in layers, so to speak. The primary story of the Bible involves a drama between God and creation, the main point of which is to display the manifold goodness and glory of God. The big picture of the Bible is the story of God's plan and work for making His glory known (Hab. 2:14). When you're reading the Bible, therefore, you must always be asking yourself, whether in the Old Testament or the New, what is God showing me about Himself, His will, and His glory? How can I see *Him* and *His purposes* and *presence* in these words I'm reading? What is God showing me about Himself, and about our Lord Jesus Christ?

If you don't get this part of the story in your reading, you might miss everything else. Treat your reading of Scripture like one of those "Magic Eye" paintings – you know, the ones with the repetitious patterns of this or that which conceal a 3-D image of, say, the Parthenon. It's in there, because the creator of the work says so. You just need to be patient, and look long and expectantly, before that hidden image emerges.

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Scripture is like that. “*It is* the glory of God,” Solomon tells us, “to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings *is* to search out a matter” (Prov. 25.2). God has embedded His glory throughout the Scriptures, and Paul says that, by letting the Holy Spirit guide us, and waiting patiently on the Lord, we who are His “royal children” can discern that glory soon enough. You just have to stay at it, praying, listening, and making some notes while you do.

#### *Follow the threads*

The first major thread in this dramatic plot line has to do with creation and everything that populates it, because it is *to* and *in* and *with* the creation that God intends to make His glory known. But the creation, and all the people in it, have some pretty dramatic sub-plots going, such as the fall into sin, rebellion against God, spiritual confusion, restoration, and so forth, and we want to identify each of these as they may be present in every passage we’re reading, depending on what that text contributes to our understanding of creation *in relation to* our understanding of God’s being, purpose, plan, and glory.

Finally, *the redemptive work of Christ* is the thread that weaves the plight of fallen people and a fallen creation into a new tapestry to the glory of God. Jesus is the central theme of the entire story of Scripture (Jn. 5.39). No matter where you’re reading, Jesus is in there somewhere, and He will connect the parts of Scripture – the books and their sub-plots and themes – to the larger narrative of the glory of God.

But we need to read patiently, taking everything together and contemplating the unity of all Scripture according to these primary themes in the story line.

So don’t oppose the parts of Scripture to one another. Let the story line of glory, creation, and redemption help you to bring Scripture together as you continue practicing right reading of the Word of God.

#### *For reflection*

1. Why do many Christians seem to “oppose” parts of Scripture? Does Scripture itself do this?
2. Augustine once explained the relationship between the Old and New Testaments by saying “The New is in the Old concealed; the Old is by the New revealed.” What do you think he meant by this? Is this a helpful way of thinking about the unity of Scripture?
3. What is the glory of God? Can you cite some passages from throughout Scripture to support the idea that this is the primary story line of the Bible?

*Next steps- Transformation: In your daily journaling, begin making notes about the glory of God, the state of creation (and humankind), and the person and work of Jesus as these come up in your daily readings. Try to see the big picture unfolding according to its primary threads as you read the Scriptures into your soul. Share with your Bible reading partner or a Christian friend how doing this is helping you to keep Scripture together.*

## 6 Read with the Saints

*So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. Acts 8.30, 31*

### *Interpretation gone mad*

The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is one of the more glorious aspects of the legacy of the Protestant Reformation. It is also one of the more dismal.

This doctrine teaches that all believers, having direct access to God through faith and the Holy Spirit, are able to understand the teaching of Scripture and gain the benefit God intends. This should encourage us in right reading of the Word of God. We *can* understand the Bible; we *can* learn the mind of God; we *can* be transformed by the living Word and the indwelling Spirit of Christ into the image of Jesus Himself (2 Cor. 3.12-18).

It is a mistake to think, however, that we can do this *alone*.

Just because we can all read and understand the Bible does not mean that Biblical interpretation should become the hermeneutical free-for-all it has sometimes been within the ranks of evangelical Christians. The Bible is not our personal spiritual palette, for us to use in painting out the life of faith however we choose. We are part of a community and Body of believers, extending through many ages, cultures, and traditions, and the Spirit of God works through the *Body*, and not just individual *members*, to bring to light the truth of God's Word.

There is, in other words, what J. I. Packer has referred to as a "Magisterium of the Holy Spirit" – a long, venerable, and consistent tradition of Biblical understanding, which has come down to us from the earliest days of the Church to guide us, like Philip with the Ethiopian courtier, in right reading of God's Word.

### *The value of tradition*

Most Christians understand the value of the interpretive tradition which is ours in the Body of Christ. Every time we recite the Apostles' Creed or sing one of the older hymns, we are positioning ourselves within a particular framework of Christian thinking. This framework we confess and celebrate; and, when it's functioning as it should, that framework guides us in understanding the Bible.

For example, the early Christians were accused of worshipping three gods, not one. Even today Islamic critics of the Christian faith make this same accusation. However, this is not what our tradition teaches. The Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Formula of Chalcedon, and a whole host of confessions, circulars, and theological treatises, from the New Testament to the Second Vatican Council and The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, profess the same thing: One God in Three Persons. This tradition of interpretation, this Magisterium of the Holy Spirit, both *guides* us in understanding the Bible and *prevents* us from "running off the rails," as has happened so often, especially among Protestant believers, and is in some ways happening again.

If we will read our Bibles with the saints who have gone before, we'll be much more likely to avoid the pitfalls of merely personal and convenient interpretations. We'll sniff out strange winds of doctrine and refuse to hoist our sails there, preferring instead the reliable winds of the Spirit which have guided the Church in every age.

So, how do we do this?

*Plenty of help*

There's plenty of help available; we just need to be willing to make good use of it. My friend Dave Conn has developed the practice of reading a one-volume Bible commentary along with his regular reading of Scripture. Works such as the *New Bible Commentary*, the *ESV Study Bible*, and the one volume *Matthew Henry's Commentary* can be valuable resources for such a discipline.

Our *Scriptorium* column uses the *Ancient Christian Commentary Series* to help us in understanding books of the Bible by drawing on insights from the Fathers of the faith.

I've also found that regular reading through [\*The Westminster Confession of Faith\*](#) helps me both to keep clear about the primary teachings of Scripture, and to gain insights into how our forebears in the faith read and understood the Bible according to the best traditions of the Church.

Obviously, there are lots of ways to go about reading Scripture with the saints of God. Find a guide or some guides to help you understand what you're reading. Invite them up into your chariot, and listen and take notes as they teach you and help you to improve your right reading of the Word of God.

*For reflection*

1. What is the "Magisterium of the Spirit"? Where did this "Magisterium" come from, and why does it matter?
2. What are the dangers involved in reading and studying Scripture without any input from this "Magisterium"?
3. The authority of "tradition" is not the same as the authority of Scripture. Both are authoritative, but not at the same level. Explain.

*Next steps – Transformation: How might you include some reading with the saints as part of your practice of right reading of the Word of God? Ask a pastor or church leader to help you with this question.*

## 7 Read for Next Steps

*Then the LORD answered me and said:  
“Write the vision  
And make it plain on tablets,  
That he may run who reads it.” Habakkuk 2.2*

### *Reading right*

We’ve been considering ways of approaching the Bible so as to read it right. There’s a good bit of *wrong* reading of Scripture going on in the Church these days, and, if we don’t want to be swept up in false teaching, we’ll need to fortify our souls against it by practicing right reading of God’s Word.

Reading right means *daily* reading, meditation, and study of God’s Word – *all* the Word of God. It means coming to the Word as a *delight* and letting the Word *inhabit, redecorate, and refurbish* our souls; allowing the *story line and primary themes* of Scripture to guide our interpretation; and *reading along with the saints* to make sure we’re not straying outside the tradition of faithful interpretation.

Anybody can read Scripture wrong, and plenty of people are doing so. Our goal is to read it *right*, and that means we’re going to have to pay a bit more attention to the disciplines we employ in this effort.

Right reading will lead to action. James says we must be *doers* of the Word, and not *hearers* only (Jms. 1.22). We deceive ourselves if we think all this reading and study of Scripture is just about gaining more head knowledge. God has given us His Word, as He gave it to the prophet Habakkuk, so that, having *read* it we might get busy *doing* it. Every passage of Scripture should suggest specific next steps that we can take to firm up and live out the teaching of God’s Word.

### *Doing God’s Word*

This is as we might expect. After all, if the Scripture is refurbishing our souls, giving us new insights to God’s character and will, and bringing us into communion with the saints of the past and present, we’re probably going to experience some changes. Paul says that what happens in right reading is that we come face to face with God, in the power of His Spirit, and the *glory of God* exerts a transformative spiritual impact on us, causing us to grow increasingly into the image of Jesus Christ. This happens as we go from *experiencing* the glory of God to *expressing* God’s glory in all the everyday details of our lives (2 Cor. 3.12-18; 1 Cor. 10.31).

We *do* God’s Word in the words and deeds and every next step that make up our daily experience of following Jesus. The goal of all our reading and study of Scripture should be to increase love for God and our neighbors (1 Tim. 1.5). So reading right will find us trying to hear God speaking to us concerning *whom* to love and *how* to love them, and what next steps to take in bringing that love to fruition. The same Word which shows us God’s glorious love equips us for good works of love in the normal course of our everyday lives (2 Tim. 3.15-17).

Doing God’s Word doesn’t mean becoming a full-time evangelist, heading off to the mission field, or selling everything you have and giving it all to the poor. It *might* mean this for some people; normally, however, God is shaping us little by little for words and deeds more characteristic of the Lord Jesus Christ, and more potent in touching others with His grace and truth.

So we’ll know that we’re reading Scripture right when, coming away from our time in the Word, we have the clear sense of what God intends us to *do* with what we have *read*. You might even consider adding to your journal page a heading that says, *Next Steps*.

## Reading the Word

### *One step at a time*

God's purpose in giving us His Word is to equip us for good works of love. We learn what good works *are* through reading, meditation, and study; but we only learn them *for ourselves* by *doing* something different with our words and deeds.

As you are reading the Word, therefore, have your pen or notebook handy. Listen for any explicit or implicit instructions from the Lord. Maintain an attitude of prayer and seeking that says, throughout your daily reading, "What shall I run to do today, Lord?" Think of the people you'll see in the day ahead, or the tasks before you. Let the Scripture you're reading suggest *small steps of obedience* that will allow you to live out your reading in the words and deeds of your everyday relationships, roles, and responsibilities.

This is what Paul means by calling us to "work out" our salvation. God has *given* us salvation by grace through faith. He continues to *teach us about salvation* each time we read His Word. We *work out our salvation* when we bring our words and deeds into the power of God's Word and Spirit, Who is at work within us to make us willing and able to do whatever lines up with the pleasure of God (Phil. 2.12, 13).

So don't be content merely to *read* the Word. Read it, read it right, and read it with a view to *living the truth* of God, making the most of every opportunity to bring the glory of God to light in even your humblest, most routine, everyday tasks. Right reading leads to right living, and this is the proof that the living Word is making all things new in our lives (Heb. 4.12; Rev. 21.5).

### *For reflection*

1. How would you explain the concept of "read to run" to a new Christian who was just getting started with the Bible?
2. Meditate on 1 Corinthians 10.31-11.1. How can this passage counsel us in thinking about daily opportunities for reading to run?
3. Meditate on 2 Corinthians 10.13-16. Paul had a sphere of influence – a Personal Mission Field – in which he lived out his Christian faith and calling. Following 1 Corinthians 11.1, should you have such a Personal Mission Field? Who would be some of the people in that field, and what opportunities for reading to run does this Personal Mission Field afford you each day?

*Next steps – Demonstration: Who are the people most likely to be affected by your next steps of faith and obedience? What other kinds of impact for the Kingdom of Jesus Christ might you expect from your daily running to obey the Word of God? Pay careful attention throughout this day as to how God leads you in doing His Word. Then, before you go to bed, give Him praise and thanks for every indication of His having been at work within you, willing and doing according to His good pleasure.*

*Reading the Word*

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. What is the danger from not following a daily regimen of Scripture reading, meditation, and study?
2. Why is it important that we read *all* of Scripture, and that we read it over and over?
3. What do we mean by a “Magisterium of the Spirit,” and how should we expect this to help us in our Bible reading, meditation, and study?
4. What can you do to help make sure that your reading of Scripture impacts your whole soul, and issues in next steps of faith and obedience?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your walk with and work for the Lord?

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org) to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.