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TRANSFORMATION

"we are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory." 2 Cor 3:18

DEVOTIONAL READING FOR TRANSFORMATION

Review

Last week we were asked to memorise a passage of scripture and take time to meditate on it during the week. Which passage did you choose? Did you notice that throughout your day that the passage crept into your thoughts? How else was this practice helpful for you?

HOW CAN I READ MY BIBLE FOR TRANSFORMATION?

It is possible that we may spend time reading our bibles, but walk away from that activity unchanged. We are like the man in James' letter who sees himself truly in God's word, and then walks away, forgetting what God has shown him:

James 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it — he will be blessed in what he does.

In this study we want to consider our personal Bible reading and how we can get the most from it. In your group, take some time to share your answers to the following:

1. What is your usual pattern of personal Bible reading?
2. What would be your top 3 tips for fruitful personal Bible reading times?
3. What would you say to someone who really struggles with finding time and space to be alone with God and his word?

There are many different ways of engaging with God through personal Bible reading—this study is going to investigate just one: the inductive/reflective 'Quiet Time'. There are four basic phases to this personal Bible reading discipline, which centre around four questions:

- (i) what does the passage say?
- (ii) what does the passage mean?
- (iii) let the passage speak for itself
- (iv) what does God want me to do about this passage?

Before you begin your time with God find a quiet place—hence the name, 'Quiet Time'—where you won't be interrupted. Select a passage of the Bible to read (tips on doing this later). Pray, settling any matters that you and God have unresolved, and then ask God to speak with you through his word, the Bible. Now follow the steps set out in the exercise on the next page. At the conclusion of your time, pray about the matters you have been reflecting upon during your Quiet Time.

Some things to ponder:

How privileged are we to personally read our Bibles???
Most people didn't own Bibles until recently. For most of church history, followers of Christ relied on the public reading and teaching of Scripture.

Personal copies of the Bible didn't become common until well after the invention of the printing press in the 15th century.

Ever used the Bible the way a drunk uses a lamppost—for support rather than light? Is there a problem with this?

GROUP REFLECTIONS

Your group might like to share their thoughts on the following topics:

How do you decide which Bible passage you will read?

Have you used any helpful 'systems' or Bible reading programs?

What are you reading at the moment?

What do you think is the optimal frequency for such times of personal Bible reading?

EXERCISE

We will do this exercise as a group today—normally you would do this alone. Our passage for this exercise today will be Philippians 2:1-18.

Have one member of your group read Philippians 2:1-18 out once, and then allow a few minutes for private re-reading and reflection on the passage.

Answer the questions written below. These are the same basic questions that you would answer for yourself in any personal Quiet Time. These questions are meant as a springboard for you, to be used generally but not 'religiously' every time you read the Bible.

What does the passage say?

4. How would you summarise the message of the whole passage in just a sentence or two?
5. Which verses particularly lead you to this conclusion about the message of the passage? Write them down in your Journal or another book exactly as they are written in your bible.
6. Are there any other verses that particularly impact you today? Write them out in your book, with space for more notes and thoughts.

What does the passage mean?

7. Explain what each of these verses would have meant to the original readers.
8. Explain what they mean for you today, using your own words and any examples from contemporary life that you can think of.

Let the passage speak for itself

9. Sit quietly and ponder the passage some more. Explore any of the suggestions from our previous two studies that discussed Journaling or Meditating on the Scriptures. The purpose of this time of reflection is to provide 'space' for God to speak through his word, outside of our own agenda.

What does God want me to do about this passage?

10. It's time now to consider the practical implications of the passage. What, particularly and specifically, will you do in response to this passage?
11. In which situations in your life does this passage challenge you? How would you like to approach those situations in the light of this passage?
12. Record any specific goals or commitments that you make. Pray about these.