
Building Bible Literacy Part I

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How well do you know the Bible?

How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.
Psalm 119:9

Most Christians may say “fairly well,” and we pastors will say “very well,” but secretly, we may be in fear that others will find out that we do not know His Word so well after all. Many of us may rationalize it, fake it, or ignore it, but for some reason, we do not make the effort or exercise diligence to really get to know it. Perhaps, it is too much work for some; perhaps, the fear factor is too high and it is easier to say “yes, I know” (basically lie), than to actually get to know Christ and His Bible. Who am I talking about? Me...the guy who started an international ministry, teaching people how to study the Bible. When I first started this endeavor some 25 years ago, I was very biblically illiterate and faked my way through it. But, I had some good mentors who called me on it, so I endeavored be more diligent and get to know the Bible, finding it was not so fearful and daunting as I thought. In fact, it was fun—and still is. But, many Christians and even some pastors are still in the dark about His Word.

I have to own up to some judgmental feelings I have from time to time with this. When I give a seminar or consult with a church, every now and then I am absolutely astounded by some pastors who lack basic Bible knowledge. Just the other day, a pastor at a very large church asked me if I had ever heard of *Caleb*. I thought he must mean a person, so I was raking my mind about who he could be talking about. (I did not want to look dumb.) Then, he asked if this *Caleb* could be found in Genesis. It was one of those moments when my mouth opened but no words came out. I can understand why some Christians might not know that Caleb was one of the original few people of the Exodus who was faithful and allowed to enter the Promise Land, and that the story can be found in Numbers and Deuteronomy—but a pastor who did not know? I can also at times understand when Christians say they do not have the time or it is too hard to read the Bible—but pastors? Pastors, whose call and job it is to proclaim the Word? I think we have a big problem with biblical literacy in America today. A lack of Bible knowledge (and application, since you can’t apply what you do not know) will lead to very significant problems, such as a lost focus for the church locally and internationally, the spread of apostasy, or of false teachings; and, we have seen all of the above.

Now, I have to say up front that I did not end up knowing the Bible overnight; it took me many years—decades in fact and I am still getting to know His Word. And, when I first entered into ministry, the only reason I knew who Caleb was is because I knew someone with that name. I was lazy with the Bible, figuring it was more important to connect with the youth than learn His word or be a disciple or make disciples. But, I had not been to seminary yet or had years of experience and time under my belt as that pastor did. I came to a point that I had to own up to my frailty in Bible literacy, buckle down, and engage it. That pastor felt it was unimportant and irrelevant to his role as a pastor!

Many years ago my great uncle (Francis A. Schaeffer) taught me the importance and relevance of knowing God's Word. He kept me accountable and told me it did not come overnight or easily; it is a life-long process and journey, and it takes hard work. There are no shortcuts to any important endeavor, whether it is learning music, becoming a doctor, becoming a pastor, or any skilled vocation or hobby. Undertaking something important is serious; it is commitment and it is hard work. At the same time, I had great fears about attempting to know His Word. I felt I would not be able to do it, which is why I faked it. I had significant learning disabilities including dyslexia, and learning for me was a tough challenge. With my uncle's encouragement and suggestions, I learned how to study and gather information. I developed a process that works and is even fun that anyone can use. In fact, I have been teaching this in my seminars since the early 80s to put people at ease when *exegetical* and *inductive* methods seem too daunting.

Why should we do this—learn His Word? Because, if we want to be mature and growing Christians—real Christians, and not just pew-sitters and noise—we must get to know Him more! God deserves our trust and submission, for there is no other way to lead a triumphant, purposeful, meaningful, and mature Christian life filled with Fruit and impact. Thus, we must see that God's Word and the precepts it contains are true, relevant, authoritative, and binding; then, we can also see its personal significance, veracity, importance, power, impact, and application upon us and those around us.

Questions

Read Psalm 119: 1-

1. Have you ever been put on the spot about a bible passage or theme and did not know it? How did you feel?
2. Has someone ever asked you a Bible question and you knew well the answer? How did that make you feel?
3. How do you feel when pastors and church leaders feel it is unimportant and even irrelevant to know the Bible well? What are some more important things for them to do, as they may think? What does God think about this?
4. Why should we do this—learn His Word?
5. How well do you know the Bible? Be honest on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being a master Bible teacher and 1, you do not know what a Bible is...
6. How does this passage motivate you to love His Word?
7. What gets in your way to know His Word?
8. Have you ever felt you had to rationalize it, fake it, or ignore it?

9. How do you feel that knowing the Bible will not come overnight or easily; it is a life-long process and journey? What can you do to see this hard work as worthy and exciting?
10. Do you think that God deserves our trust and submission? If so, how would daily Bible reading help you lead a more triumphant, purposeful, meaningful, and mature Christian life filled with Fruit and impact?
11. Why are God's precepts convicting and challenging to people? How are they challenging to you?
12. What needs to happen to move from your means and ways to His Way?
13. What does it take for you to buckle down, and engage the Bible?
14. Who can help you be more accountable and hold you to this endeavor of getting to know our Lord and His precepts better? What will your life look like in so doing?
15. What happens when a Christian leader deduces that this doesn't apply to him or her and teaches what he or she does not believe or follow?
16. Think how much more your life will be a straightforward, content Christian life with meaning and purpose?
17. What can you do to take sin seriously and allow God's conviction to remove what is in the way of your growth?
18. What would your church look like if its leadership and people operated more in God's Word and Way?