



abcLinks

connecting personal and small group studies with this week's sermon

For the sermon on August 1-2, 2009

this week's coreverse

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.

2 Timothy 3.16-17 NLT

usingabcLinks

Personal Bible Studies (inside pages)

- Personal studies that explore Scripture passages related to this week's sermon. They are broken down into three or four days. Some days you will simply read, meditate or think about a passage of scripture. Other days you will be asked to dig into a passage through reading, studying, answering questions.

Small Group Discussion (back page)

- Small group questions that connect with the sermon and your personal Bible study. This series of questions act as a funnel to help your group discussion flow in a purposeful point.
- If you are not in a small group, contact one of our small group staff members to get more information on ABC Small Groups or go to adable.org>small groups.

See adable.org>message recaps & Links for ABCLinks archives.



Part Two of a Five Part Sermon Series

"The Window of the Word"

It was a perfect day to be lying flat on a trail. I was so relaxed on the outside but inside my soul was stirring. I'd been wrestling with God for months, trying to better understand what other people described to me as intimacy or closeness with God. I believed in intimacy ... but it seemed like something others experienced. For some reason, God wasn't revealing himself to me as he was to others. I knew God was at work around and in me, but still he seemed distant.

The trail that I lay on was a beautiful path cut by a woman named Julie. Julie owns a place called Most High Barn. She offers her entire home and horse farm for people in ministry to use for prayer and spiritual refreshment. Ten of us from the Ada Bible Church staff were there for a day-long prayer retreat. Even in my struggle for intimacy, my heart that day was open to experience whatever God had for me. As I walked the trail, I told God I had no expectations for the day, and I would not demand that he answer my question of why others experience him in a way I don't.

Stopping on the trail to lie in the shade seemed right for the moment. I remembered that in my pocket was a booklet one our staff had put together, designed to encourage me pray with adoration, confession, thanksgiving and request. I held it over my head, reading the first pages while shading my face. In those moments, God met me in a way I've never experienced him. It was fresh. It was new. It was real. And, it made me physically shudder. Printed in the first pages of the booklet was Psalm 139, a psalm not at all new to me -- I've read this passage many times. But as I read verse 17, it was as if God had dropped some new words into the text. They seemed unfamiliar, unseen and written directly to me, for that day, for that time, for my struggle. Here are the words that stopped my heart for a moment,

How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered. I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand! Psalm 139.17

These words shook me to the core. I was physically and spiritually undone to the point of uncontrollable tears. It was as if I had just realized that God thinks about *me* ... a lot. And his thoughts about me are precious. God knew my struggle, knew what I needed in my sacred journey, and gave me a taste of his goodness. He did it through his Word, inspired 3,000 years ago. God's Word brought life, it restored my soul, and gave me the perspective I so desperately needed that day.

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. Hebrews 4.12



ada bible church
8899 cascade road se
ada, mi 49301
616.868.7005 | adable.org

Author information

Phil Niekerk, senior small group pastor



personal bible studies

Imagine you come to an old house. From the outside, you can tell it has some tremendous character and history. But, it's a tad rundown and unkempt. As you walk up the driveway, you see that the trees and bushes are overgrown, hiding the beautiful windows that once brought light and fresh air to the inside. Dark and dreary is what you feel in the room as you step through the door. Smells of mustiness and mold are made more potent by the humidity in the room. Light and fresh air are what the place needs first and foremost.

You grab some tools and attempt to pry open the shutters, only to realize that the windows have been painted shut. It takes a lot of effort to free the windows from the caked paint. When the windows are hoisted open, you feel the light burst on your face and you smell the freshness of the outdoor air replace the musty, mildew stench. The building now has hope. Life is returning.

Have your habits of Bible reading grown musty and stale? If so, don't fret. It happens to most Jesus-followers from time to time. We need to do the hard work of prying open those windows of scripture reading so God can bring in light and air to our communication with him. This week, we'll explore some passages that may help you get those sticky windows open.

Part One | Reading without Understanding

One common objection to reading the Bible is simply, "I just don't understand it." Read the following passages and notice that this objection has been raised before.

Acts 8.26-40 and Nehemiah 8.8

In each of these stories, what was done to help the people grasp what they didn't understand?

Which phrase describes you and the Bible's place in your life?

- ~ I feel clueless. Where do I start?
- ~ I've tried to study it, but I'm not sure how the pieces fit together.
- ~ I've got a handle on how the Bible works.
- ~ I love studying Scripture. I'm learning something every day.
- ~ I love teaching and sharing what I'm learning.

What would it take for you to move down this continuum? Is it your heart, hands, or head that needs to move?

We have an enormous amount of tools and resources available to help us understand the Bible. Circle the ones you have and underline the ones you need.

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| small group | study Bible | regular church attendance | spiritual mentor |
| online resources | classes | books and commentaries | |

Part Two | Information without Transformation

Reading and understanding Scripture should lead to change in our lives. Muse on Paul's words to his pastoral protege about how Scriptures should be used in our lives.

... and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3.15-17

Describe how each of these is accomplished in your life's circumstances:

Teaching - knowing more about God, his world and his plan

Rebuking - refuting that which is false

Correction - fixing, healing, or correcting something that's broken

Training - preparing to do something with what you know

James, Jesus's half-brother, wrote some poignant words about not just hearing, but doing. Read the verses below and think about James's words for a few moments. Make an honest assessment of your desire to hear and do. Are there things you've heard but not done? What is the outcome for those who do what they hear from God's Word?

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 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 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 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.

James 1.22-25

Part Three | Obedience without Grace

A tragedy that can happen when someone reads, understands, and obeys scripture is that he or she may become *grace-less*. In other words, being obedient can tragically cause someone to think they are righteous because of what they've done. They have missed the point of obedience. They have missed the relationship of grace.

Read Luke 15.28-32. This is the tail-end of the story of the prodigal son. The son who left has now returned to a gracious, welcoming, celebratory father. The older brother, who never left and was consistently obedient to his father, is disgusted with his father's grace.

What should have been the older brother's response to his younger brother's return? How have you seen this played out? Where have you seen obedience trump grace?



small group discussion

lean in

When did you first begin to read the Bible? Why did you start? Did anyone help you understand? Who?

lookdown

Read together 2 Timothy 3.15-17.

What purposes did Paul give Timothy for Scripture? Describe each purpose. How do they look in today's world?

lookout

What are the biggest barriers to people not reading the Bible? What excuses have you heard? Are any of these excuses valid?

look in

Discuss the following dangers that can occur as you attempt to read Scripture:

Reading without understanding

"It's too hard." "I don't get it." "Where do I even start?"

Have someone retell the story found in Acts 8.26-40. What was the answer to this dilemma for the Ethiopian?

Have you experienced this danger? What are your solutions to not understanding? Where or to whom have you gone for help?

Pieces of Scripture without the story

What are some methods or approaches of reading Scripture that can cause us to miss the story of God? Are these methods helpful in any way? How so?

What is the importance of studying in such a way as to discover the story of God and his people?

Understanding without obedience

Have someone read James 1.22-25. Have you ever come across a person or group of people who were very knowledgeable in regards to the Bible, but seemed to ignore what they learned? Have you seen this in your life? How does this usually play out?

Obedience without grace

Have someone read Luke 15.28-32. Do you identify with the older son in any way? Does he have a point?

What did the older brother miss in his attitude concerning obedience to his father? What does this lesson teach about the importance of obedience?