

(2) Who Can Understand Scripture?

Understanding Scripture

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Well, it's my pleasure to add the word of welcome that Dane gave to you this morning. It's so good to see so many people out and to have you joining us over the internet for the live stream if you're doing that. We're delighted to continue our study this weekend on understanding Scripture and last night we opened up with a topic on the clarity of Scripture, the perspicuity of Scripture as theologians call it, giving us the sense that as an objective matter, as something external to us, the Bible by its very nature and content and quality is a book that can be understood and that is its intrinsic nature. It is clear by definition. It is clear in its very character. Yet, not everyone appreciates the Scripture. Not everyone can read it and understand it and so we want to advance to a different question here this morning for our first session this morning and answer this question: who can understand Scripture? Who can understand Scripture? If the Bible is clear and it can be understood and yet not everyone understands it, we want to answer the question who can understand it. That's the most important question that, in some respects, you could ask about the clarity of Scripture because everything that we were just singing about, about the amazing grace of God, the grace that teaches our heart to fear, that secures our hope, that gives us promise about our eternal life in heaven, all of that is rooted in the teaching of Scripture and so the question that we want to know if we want to understand that, if we love that and appreciate it, then we only know that through God's word. We don't know it through the subjective impulses of our minds or what so-called charismatic teachers say when they say they've come back from heaven. All of that is completely bogus. We know these things because they're found in the word of God and so we want to ask the question: who can understand Scripture?

Maybe to bring it down and to narrow the focus just a little bit more even to those of you that are with us today, maybe we could ask the question a little bit differently: can you feed yourself with your own Bible study? Can you as a Christian profit spiritually from your own reading of God's word? And the answer to that question is an unqualified yes. You certainly can do that and three principles are going to help you get started today. By the way, I should say this: the things that we're teaching this weekend, we understand, I understand and feel the weight of the fact that they certainly are not exhaustive. We're not saying everything that could be said about this subject this weekend. We're not saying everything that should be said about this subject this weekend. We're just trying to get some very basic fundamental things into place. When a contractor builds a building, he has to lay a foundation and that is essential and everything else is built on that but he

understands as he's laying the foundation that he's not finishing the work when the concrete pour is done, but that everything that follows is going to be built on this.

Well, that kind of gives you a sense of what we're trying to do here this weekend, is to lay a foundation that can be built upon going forward in your own life and in the life of our church and that we're not saying everything that can be said. We're not hitting the finish line so that everything is exhausted, rather, we're giving you principles that you can run with in your own personal life and for some this may be review and very elementary. I think that for many of you, this is going to be something that is very richly encouraging for you as we go forward. Who can understand Scripture? You can if you're a Christian and there are three ways that we know that to be true. First of all, I want to just show you the promise of Scripture. The promise of Scripture. How can you know as somebody that's fairly new to the Bible, how can you know that you can understand Scripture?

First of all, Scripture promises that to you and I think that this is important for us to reemphasize even though we mentioned it some last night. You are much more likely to consistently read God's word if you know that God will bless you for it. If you have a sense of confidence, if you have a sure word from God in his word that says, "Blessing awaits the one who seeks my word," then you're more likely to seek it. There is advantage to you. There is blessing that waits for you on the other side of consistently reading God's word.

I want to take you back to Psalm 1 to start here. We looked at it last night, but it's such a foundational text that we'll go back to it again. Psalm 1 is where I'd like you to turn for now. Psalm 1, looking at verses 2 and 3 once more where the Psalmist is describing the blessed man and he says that this blessed man can be identified, verse 2, because "his delight is in the law of the LORD." He finds satisfaction. His priority, his desire is rooted in God's word and what does he do as a result of that because that's where his heart is anchored? How does that manifest itself? Verse 2, "in His law he meditates day and night." He reads it. He thinks about it. He contemplates how it applies to his life, to his thinking, to his conduct, to his relationships. So his mind is continually going over the word of God and, as we saw last night, that's something that's open to you as a humble believer in Christ.

What does it say in verse 3? What's the promise of Scripture that is made to one like that? "He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers." Not promising financial prosperity to everyone who ever opens the word of God. That's not the point. The point is that there will be a confidence. There will be a spiritual serenity. There will be an ever growing spiritual maturity that marks a man who opens God's word and reads it and thinks about it and that's not qualified, that's not limited to scholars or pastors or experts. Sometimes they just get in the way of things, frankly, and sometimes their pride puffs them up and actually excludes them from this. The New Testament talks about that, doesn't it? Knowledge puffs up but love edifies.

Well, here we have in Scripture the indication from God that if you will be a man, a woman, a boy, a girl, that devotes yourself to God's word, that your life will be affected by it and what we have to do, there is a whole message that I should speak on the two sentences that I'm about to speak on. We've been conditioned in American evangelicalism over the past few decades toward a decisionistic mindset toward salvation: you raise your hand; you come forward; you get saved. And messages traditionally have been oriented toward forcing you toward a dramatic moment of commitment and raising your hand and emotional climaxes and all of that. Look, that's actually counterproductive to your long term spiritual stability. If you're always looking for a spiritual high, if you're always looking for that emotional impact, it's going to actually work to your spiritual destruction over time. It's just like eating candy and sugar all the time, you get a nice little buzz off of it from the start, but that's not the nutrition that carries you on and eventually you just kind of get sick to your stomach if you eat too much of that stuff.

Well, it's the same way with always wanting something emotional, something really dramatic to occur. Look, a lot of God's work happens imperceptibly. It happens in just the quiet bonds of faithfulness as you're reading his word and you're just walking day by day in his word and maybe not every time is the greatest devotional that has ever happened. That's alright. That's alright. Stop looking for those emotional highs and just commit yourself to walking faithfully through God's word day by day, week by week, and recognize that just as in a young child, growth is imperceptible day by day but it's evident over time. So in the same way, God's word will work in your life imperceptibly, seemingly day by day, but then you look at your life after walking in God's word for a year, three years, five years, ten years, you look back and say, "My life is completely different. I am a completely different man than what I used to be," either from going from an unconverted to a converted state or from a Christian growing from the image, from one reflection of the glory of Christ to a greater one. So I encourage you as strongly as I possibly can to commit yourself and to make it your priority and your desire faithfulness day by day over time and let the emotional highs come and go as they will. That will give you a stability and a confidence and take a lot of pressure off and actually free your mind to be able to absorb God's word in a far more productive way.

So the promise of Scripture is that there will be a spiritual prosperity that marks the lives of the ones that give themselves to God's word. Let's look at one more familiar passage in 2 Timothy 3. I know you know this passage. That's alright. Peter didn't mind writing to his readers and saying, "I'm going to stir you up by way of reminder once more." Scripture repeatedly reminds us of things and therefore it's appropriate for us from a Christian pulpit to remind you of things that you already know because some things are so foundational that we need to go to them again and again. We don't outgrow some of these things and the centrality of Scripture and the promise of blessing is one that we should never be far from.

2 Timothy 3:16 and 17 says, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." Notice a couple of things about it: all

Scripture, Genesis through Revelation, the genealogies and chronicles are profitable to you in ways that may not be as immediately evident as other parts of Scripture but every part of Scripture is God-breathed and it is profitable for the Christian. So that expands our sense of the vista that we want to pursue in God's word. We want to pursue all of it. It should be the desire of your heart as a Christian, "I want to read the entire Bible," not simply the Gospel of John and the first eight chapters of Romans. Or a few favorite Psalms that you just read repeatedly and neglect the rest of the word of God. The entirety of Scripture is profitable to you. It is worth your time. It is intrinsically, infinitely valuable because every word of Scripture came from the mouth of God and he didn't put it in the word for no reason.

What do we see as a result of that as we embrace Scripture? We find that it's profitable. We find that it makes you adequate for the life that God has given you. For the discouragements that you feel in relationships. For the uncertainty that you feel about your future or about your health conditions. God's word consistently read over a period of time, makes you adequate for all of that and ten thousand things more. It makes you adequate for the joys that are just ahead in life and as you anticipate some of the great things that are about to happen in, let's say, the next seven days or maybe the next nine months, as you're looking forward to that, God's word will inform and bless you for that.

So knowing that, knowing that all of God's word prepares you for all of life and blesses you in it, then you say, "Then I want this word. I want it for myself. I don't want the blessing of reading the Scripture and being engaged in the thought of the Bible to be simply for the elders of the church. I don't want that to just be my pastor, I want my share of it. I want God's word for myself," should be the animating desire of your heart because you as a young man, you as a new Christian, you as a busy mom, God's word is there for you to be understood and promises blessing on you as you seek it and so that's what we want to do. Doesn't that make you want to read God's word? Doesn't it make you want to understand it? To know that there is just untold blessing waiting to be appropriated for you as a Christian? There's not a one of you that's in this room or listening over the internet that shouldn't want that. Why would we not want blessing from God that he dispenses through his inerrant word? There is nothing to be said but say, "Hey, let's get started. Help me. Point me in the right direction."

So the promise of Scripture is held out to you that you can understand this and profit from it. Now, with that said, when you start exploring the way that God has blessed us as believers, you just start to swim in an ocean and it is infinite. There is no limit to the blessing that God has given to his people and that's true as we study and consider who it is that can understand Scripture because God has not just made promises to us in the Scripture, he's also done something else: he's given us the provision of his Spirit. The provision of his Spirit.

Now, I try to be realistic as I teach and preach. I believe that the teaching of the Bible in the local church should be accessible to every Christian and that it should be that which everyone can profit from and there are times where you put the cookies on the bottom shelf, so to speak, so that everyone can appropriate it. But I understand, I want to be

realistic that for someone who is new to the Bible or someone that hasn't really made an effort to systematically read God's word, if you're new to the Bible or if you haven't spent much time reading it, I understand that as a book, it can be intimidating at the start. I think the Bible that I preach out of has 1,286 pages. That's a lot. There are 66 books that were written over a period of 1,500 years from 3,500 to 2,000 years ago, and there is just such a complete wealth of content and such an abundance there that it's very hard to know where even to start if you're brand new to it. You understand that, don't you? And sometimes the sheer volume of it might lead you to shrink back and say, "Well, I think I'll just leave it to the pastor. I'll leave it to the scholars and I won't try to do this for myself because there is just too much there. I don't even know where to begin."

Well, take heart. You don't have to separate yourself from the promise of God's blessing for those who read Scripture, you can get started. In fact, God has already given you if you are a Christian far more than you could imagine to prepare you for exactly this adventure of moving into God's word and developing a lifestyle pattern, a lifelong pattern of being a reader and student of God's word. He has prepared you for it in a supernatural way, because what God has done for you as a Christian is he has put his Holy Spirit inside you. The Spirit indwells you and gives you a supernatural capacity to read and understand words – watch this – a supernatural capacity to read and understand God's word that goes far beyond, infinitely beyond your natural ability to read and understand. God hasn't simply given a word and promises at a distance and then told you to go out and do it and left you on your own. Jesus said in a different context to his disciples, he said, "I won't leave you as orphans," as he was getting ready to ascend into heaven just on the night before his crucifixion. He said, "I won't leave you as orphans. I'll send my Spirit to help you." Now we, 2,000 years as believers, enjoy the fulfillment of that promise as well. The Holy Spirit indwells us and one of his specific ministries is to help you as a Christian understand God's word.

Look at 1 Corinthians 2. This is so fundamental and not only motivates you with a sense of anticipation because of the promises of Scripture, this gives you the sense that God has prepared me, God has enabled me, God in the fullness of the blessing that he has given in salvation, has made it possible for me to read and to understand. In fact, that is the expectation of the Christian life.

1 Corinthians 2:11 says this, the Apostle Paul says, "Who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God." The Spirit of God knows the thoughts of God. What about that Spirit? Verse 12, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that," here's the purpose clause, "we may know the things freely given to us by God." So the Spirit of God who inspired the word of God knows the thoughts of God and as part of his incomprehensibly wonderful plan of salvation, God imparts his Spirit to us in a way that the Spirit now indwells us – and watch this – one of the primary reasons he did that was so that we would glean spiritual understanding from his word that the Spirit inspired. God gave you the Holy Spirit as a Christian with the intention that the Spirit would work in your heart, not to make you speak in tongues and flop around on a floor like an idiot. He gave you his Spirit so that

your mind could comprehend, understand and apply the word of God to your life. That's incredible.

Paul says, verse 13, "which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words." God's word is precious. Psalm 138 says that he exalts it above his name and you were a precious object as a Christian, of God's affection. So much so that Christ gave himself up for you and sacrificed himself to turn away the wrath of God from your sins and to bring you into the family of God, guaranteeing that you would be born again, not simply making it possible. Then when God moved on your heart and you became a Christian, God gave you his Spirit. Why? In large part, it was so that you could understand God's word and that you would not be an orphan. You would not be meandering through life in a sense of darkness, but that there might be clarity and light and understanding as your own personal precious possession because the Spirit of God works in your heart and unfolds God's word to you in a way that you can understand and appropriate. The Spirit who inspired Scripture now lives in us and will help you understand the Bible. Theologians call this the illumination of the Spirit, simply saying the Holy Spirit helps us and enables us to understand God's word.

Now, that's a precious gift. I think that as we come out of this weekend we should be motivated to read God's word and we should also just have a sense of profound gratitude for all that God has done for us. I mean, honestly, the blessings that God has given us are just incalculable. They are infinite. That he secured the salvation of our soul. That we have the hope of eternal life. Of unending perfected bliss with Christ in his throne forever. And even as we walk through this life, we have the gift of his word, the gift of his Spirit, the sense of assurance that we truly belong to him as we sometimes sing in the hymn, "I am his and he is mine." Wow. Awesome.

By contrast, our sense of the value of that blessing is to realize that when we were unsaved, we didn't have that blessing and as Christians today, we realize that God has blessed us with an amazing grace; with a favor that is unknown to the unsaved man and it humbles us to realize that though we were once just like they, that here we are in this position of rich spiritual blessing. By contrast, we realize that not only does the unsaved man not have these things, that in his natural condition, he cannot understand the things that are most precious to us.

You're in 1 Corinthians 2, look at verse 14. Paul goes on and draws the contrast. "We have received the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God," verse 14, "But a natural man," an unsaved man, what can we say about him? "He does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them." He does not have the ability to understand them "because they are spiritually appraised." That which is most precious to us, Scripture says the natural man can't even understand these things and so to kind of step back and look at the big principle that we're asking here: who can understand God's word? You must be a Christian to understand God's word because the unsaved man does not understand.

Look over at 2 Corinthians 4:3. There is such a spiritual dimension to this that is vital for us to remember. 2 Corinthians 4:3, Paul says, "If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." So they can't understand it. Satan blinds them to prevent their understanding and then another passage that we need to keep in mind is that the unsaved man, he's in that miserable condition, yes, but there is also a self-imposed darkness that is at work in that as well. Jesus said that, "The Light has come into the world," John 3:19, "but men loved the darkness rather than the Light for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."

So we asked the question: who can understand Scripture? The Christian can because God has imparted his Spirit to us so that we can understand but we realize that an unsaved man cannot. The Bible is a closed book to him. Satan has blinded his eyes and, in fact, some of his blindness is self-imposed because he loves sin more than desiring the light and the truth and so not everyone can understand Scripture and there are unseen, invisible, spiritual dynamics that are at work when any man approaches this book. This book is holy. I remember as an unsaved person, this just occurred to me, I remember before I was a Christian, there was a sense in which I was afraid of the Bible. I was afraid to pick one up and it was an irrational fear and I couldn't articulate why that was the case. Looking back on it now I can, but there is something unique about God's word and it's right for an unsaved man to fear the word of God because this word speaks to his condition and condemns him in sin and calls him to Christ.

So, what can we say about this? Well, let me just pause for a moment and just bring out a word of pastoral input, perhaps for a couple, 3, 4, 5 of you that are here. You know, if you never understand God's word, if you never desire the Scriptures, you're indifferent to Scripture and who knows why you're in this room, maybe your parents made you come or a spouse made you come or whatever, but if you never understand Scripture, no matter what kind of spiritual background you've had in the past, you need to deal with the reality that you're probably not a Christian despite what you call yourself. In fact, if you never desire God's word, you're not a Christian. That's just the way that it is because God gives his Spirit to us in part to draw us into his word and to desire it and to understand it. So if you never have any impulse of desire for Scripture no matter what you're like externally, you should not think that you're a Christian.

I remember. Some of these things are so basic to me and some of these things that we're talking about were operating in my mind right at that period in my life just before and just after I became a Christian so this is all really kind of personal to me. I can't think about these things without remembering how God worked in my life. I remember before I became a Christian, maybe a few months beforehand, I picked up a Bible and I tried to read John 17. I don't know what took me there, but I read John 17, Jesus' high priestly prayer where he prays and talks about God restoring to him the glory that he enjoyed with the Father before time began, the general gist of that. I read that and it was absolute gobbledygook to me. I had no idea whatsoever what that was talking about. I couldn't

have understood it any better than if I had just left my Bible closed and never looked at the passage because it was closed to me at that time. It made no sense – but watch this – it's not because the passage was unclear. What Jesus said in that prayer is profound but it can be understood, the problem was not with what Jesus said and prayed to the Father. That came from a divine perfect mind clearly expressing his thoughts to the Father who could perfectly understand them. The problem was I was dead in sin. I was on the outside looking in to something that I had no part in.

As a Christian, beloved, you're not in that miserable position that I was in. The Holy Spirit indwells you and lifts you beyond your natural ability. He opens your mind. It's like iron gates are clanged shut on your mind as an unbeliever and yet the Holy Spirit just as when he came in and he released Peter from his prison cell and the gates opened up, when you become a Christian, the Holy Spirit opens the gates of your understanding so that you can walk out of your darkness and into an understanding of God's word. What a great gift. God gives us a new mind. He gives us a new nature that can receive it.

On the happy side, on the happy side of my conversion and this is one of the ways that it was evident to me very quickly when my conversion was real. When I was truly converted and I went out and I bought a Bible, I came home and read it like that night, that Monday night. I bought that Bible and I came home and I read it and I opened up, I think it was the Gospel of Matthew. Maybe it was the book of Proverbs and I started to read it, expecting and here's the thing and I say these things maybe to just help you identify in your own experience things that are going on as an illustration, not to make myself the point of attention here. But I opened up the Bible for the first time as a Christian, getting ready to read it because somehow I knew that that's what a Christian was supposed to do, but I opened it up from the perspective of it was a dark and locked book to me before. So out of a sense of duty I opened up this book, opened up the Bible, and started to read it with the expectation that it was going to be hard and difficult once again but because I was now a Christian, I was going to pursue it.

So, you know, with a little bit of a clenched jaw and all that, I opened it up and I started to read the Bible and within, I don't know, 30 seconds, three minutes, maybe ten minutes, I'm reading the Scripture and I understand it. I know what it means and as I'm reading God's word for the first time as a Christian, there is a reverberation going on in my mind that says, "This is true. This is true and not only is it true, I understand what it's saying." It was incredible and there was no pastor standing there discipling me at the time. There was no study notes. It was me as a brand new infant baby Christian with only the word of God open in front of me and I could read it and understand it and the lights were on.

Why? What changed from John 17 to that moment? It wasn't because I suddenly took a Bible course and I understood new principles of reading that I hadn't had before. There was nothing like that. What had changed was an invisible change inside and God had worked in my heart and opened my mind to receive Christ and put his Spirit in and now everything clicked. That's precious and it illustrates how even the newest believer without any other study helps around him, the newest believer who simply has the word of God in front of him and the Spirit of God inside him is able to profitably read God's word and

know that it's true and understand the basic gist of its teaching because Scripture is clear and because God the Holy Spirit supernaturally enables his child to understand. The Spirit of God who wrote the word of God helps the child of God to read and to understand.

So if you're here as a Christian today, absolutely there is nothing unique about that experience I just described to you. It's emotional to me just because it's personal to me and those moments, those early days, changed the whole trajectory of my life, but the same gift has been given to you as a Christian. The same word belongs to you as a Christian and the same expectation that God will give you understanding belongs to you as well. So, yes, by all means you should open the word of God and read it with the expectation that God will impart understanding that will help you to know him and shape your life.

Now, we said there is the promise of Scripture and the provision of the Spirit. There is one other aspect that we need to look at; a third aspect that we need to consider and that's the preparation for Scripture. The preparation for Scripture. We speak in these most broad general principles that set the whole framework and yet we need to continue to refine and to get our understanding to exactly what it needs to be. Everything that we've said about the promise of Scripture and the provision of the Spirit is true but we need to understand that there are also certain spiritual traits that God requires from those who would know his word. There are certain things that need to be in place if you would be a student of God's word.

First of all we would say this: you must turn from sin. You must turn from sin. A sinful heart is not prepared to receive God's word and you cannot simultaneously in a stubborn, hard-hearted way cling to sin in your life and expect to have an understanding of Scripture unfolding as you read it. You have to let one or the other go. Someone said and it has been often repeated that sin will keep you from this book or this book will keep you from sin and I know that you understand that from your own personal experience if you're a Christian, that when you're conscious of sin and you're being a little bit stubborn about it, you start to lose the desire for God's word. When you repent, when you confess it, then God's word seems sweet once again. Well, Scripture describes that process. Scripture tells you that you must turn away from sin and repent if you would be one who would comprehend God's word.

Look at 1 Peter 1, just after the book of James for those of you that are still getting familiar with where the books of the Bible are. That's fine. You're in the right place. This is how you get started. 1 Peter 1:22, Peter writes to the readers and reminds them of their conversion and he says, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God." It was the word of God that taught you what you needed to know in order to turn to Christ and away from sin.

Verse 24, "For, 'All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord endures forever.' And this is the word which was preached to you." Peter says, "You remember your conversion. You remember the centrality of the word." He brings that to mind, well, then he goes in chapter 2 and he applies it and he says, "Therefore, in light of your conversion, in light of the nature of the word of God, here's what you need to do." "Putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord." Peter says, "Do you want to understand God's word? Understand that you need to turn away from those sins in your life and not just the external ones, those internal attitudes of malice and deceit and hypocrisy and envy. You need to put that all away. You need to be specific and intrusive and looking to step on your toes, perhaps a little bit, for the sake of your soul. You need to put aside and let go of some of the bitterness. In fact, you need to let it all go. You need to put away the bitterness and say, 'Do you know what? I want to understand God's word and therefore the bitterness that I feel and the settled resentment that I feel against So-and-so, I'm going to let that go and not cherish that and churn that and cultivate that any longer because I realize that as I'm doing that, I am squelching the word of God in my life and that's the last thing I want. Why? Because God's word is clear. Because it's precious. Because it can be understood. Because it promises blessing to me and that's the glory of all of that. It's so precious to me that I don't want to cling to my little earthly spats because that would keep me from the glory of what I know is contained in God's word.'"

So, you see, beloved, here is the thing: when we get serious about God's word, reading it, understanding it, we see how crystal clear it is and how precious it is and everything that it promises to us, well, there start to become ethical demands, character implications on that for you. I can't always every ounce of passion that I feel out or people would start asking, "Why is Pastor Don yelling at us?" Remember that from last night, right? Look, God is holy and his word is holy. God expects his word to be treated as holy. He doesn't just convey understanding of it to minds that are in hostility toward him. Those who reject God as unbelievers because they love their sin more should understand that they're choosing sin over God's word. We as the people of God, should realize that God is holy and he is a God without partiality. That if his word is holy, then we should have holy affections and holy dispositions as we come and not expect to cling on the one hand to our sinful former way of life and fractured relationships, that we could actually do something to bring peace to. We can't approach a holy word with a sinful disposition. That wouldn't be right and we need to respect the holiness of God and we need to respect the holiness of his word as we come to it and say, "As I'm trusting in Christ, I'm also going to consciously turn from any known sin in my life. Why? Not because I'm trying to impress anybody but because I desire this word and I understand that I can't be holding onto sin with one hand as I try to open the Bible with the other."

So what we believe about Scripture, the doctrine of Scripture, points us to sanctification and in your marriage, men and women, you husband and wives, elsewhere Peter says, we're in Peter, let's just turn there. 1 Peter 3:7 says something along these same lines, not referring specifically to Scripture but the implications of sin in the life of a believer. 1

Peter 3:7, "You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered." Don't come to God while you've been cultivating conflict with your spouse and expect that God is going to receive your prayers favorably. It will hinder your spiritual life. So we realize that we cannot be indifferent as we approach God as believers, as we come to his word, as we come to prayer. We realize that we have to turn from sin. That is the call of God and it is right and fitting that he should do that and for some of you, maybe you just need to stop making excuses with your mediocre spiritual life and say, "Do you know what? All of this points me to the fact that I have some spiritual business to do with God." I say that not to scold you. I'm not yelling, am I? Not to scold you but for your own spiritual benefit. To realize that this is the path forward to God's blessing. Sinful attitudes, sinful relationships, you have to let them go. You have to set them aside. You have to turn away from them if you would have this blessing as your own.

Now, that's the spiritual side of it, you could say. What else could we say about this preparation for Scripture? Secondly, you must work for it. You must work for God's word. You must turn from sin. You must work for God's word. That's part of the preparation of receiving understanding. Scripture says that we must seek God's word like a treasure and that the desire and – watch this – the effort that you make toward it should be commensurate with the value of what you're seeking.

Look at Proverbs 2, a very challenging section of Scripture. Proverbs 2:1 says, "My son, if you will receive my words And treasure my commandments within you, Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding; For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding; If you seek her as silver And search for her as for hidden treasures; Then you will discern the fear of the LORD And discover the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding." Men will go to great lengths to find earthly treasure. Some men, as you know, will make a career out of searching for shipwrecks; a career of digging for gold; mining for jewels maybe in the realm of South Africa where so many of our diamonds come from. But a lot of effort and a lot of machinery and a lot of digging and a whole lot goes to trying to find a little precious jewel. Well, Scripture compares the search for earthly treasure to the desire that you should have and the effort that you're willing to make in order to pursue God's word.

You see, this book, the Bible is an accessible book if you set your heart on it, but it takes effort that corresponds to its great value. In other words understand this: God does not promise understanding of the Scriptures to you apart from your own effort and it would be wrong for someone on the one hand to say, "Okay, I've got the Holy Spirit. I've got God's word here and in 30 seconds I want to open up a passage and I want to immediately understand what it says." That's crazy. That is an insult to the holiness of God to take such a casual approach to his word. God's word, given its great value, requires a valuable response of effort; of reading; of study; of seeking. The diamonds are buried to be searched for. The meaning of Scripture requires your effort to find it.

Look at 2 Timothy 2. You see, a lazy man has no claim on understanding God's word. An indifferent woman who cares not to crack open the Scripture should not expect the blessings and the understanding that God promises in his word to be made to them. 2 Timothy 2:15 says, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." Diligence. Handling it accurately. It assumes that there is mental effort and there is time to be invested into it.

So we embrace that and the thing that I would say to you as we've talked about these things this morning and last night, we realize that God's word is precious and you start to aspire after it, well, understand that God doesn't just dump understanding on us. God doesn't give profound insight into his word irrespective of the condition of your heart or the effort that you make for it. Understanding is there for the taking but you have to reach out and pursue it with diligence to find it.

So that's part of the preparation for Scripture. There is a spiritual dimension of sanctification and there is this dimension also of realizing that, "Okay, this is going to take some time and effort for me to do," and you say, "I'm up for it. I'm up for it." If a man can hire a ship to go out and look for a chest of gold buried in the ocean, the least that I can do is orient my time so that somewhere in my life there is a section cut out so that God's word can be pursued by me. That would only be right. If I say with my mouth that God's word is more valuable than earthly treasure, which it is, then we say then somewhere in my life there is a corresponding effort to seek it out.

Now, I'm confident that that marks this room generally and specifically. Why else would you be here on a Saturday morning except that that's what's already in your desire. Your presence here today is a mark of the fact that, yes, you want to make the effort to understand Scripture. That's why you're here. Well, let me just affirm that and encourage you to pursue the impulses, the desires that brought you here this morning. Feed them. Multiply them so that this treasure would be yours.

The last thing in this preparation for Scripture. You must turn from sin. You must work for God's word. Finally, you must look to God's Spirit. You must look to God's Spirit. Desire and effort are necessary, but we approach Scripture in a spirit of dependence and we should humbly ask for the Spirit's help and with the Spirit dwelling within us, we don't act independently of that. We're mindful that the Spirit gave us this word. We hold it outside ourselves and we have the Spirit within and we say, "O Spirit of God, be my teacher. Help me and lead me as I read, as I study." We humbly ask him for help.

Look at Psalm 119 and this is our final text here for this session. Psalm 119, this great ode to the word of God, has embedded in it a prayerful spirit asking for God's help to understand it. I'm just going to walk you through four or five verses just to give you a sense of the spirit of it all. Psalm 119:12 says, "Blessed are You, O LORD; Teach me Your statutes." God, I come to your word. Teach me as I do. Verse 18, "Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Your law." Verse 33, "Dane read it to open the service without any coordination with me, verse 33, "Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, And I shall observe it to the end. Give me understanding, that I may

observe Your law." Verse 73, "Your hands made me and fashioned me; Give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments." Finally, verse 125 which I read last night. That was in coordination with me. Think about it later, you'll laugh. You'll say, "Think about that later, that was funny." Verse 125, "I am Your servant; give me understanding, That I may know Your testimonies." Notice that as the Psalmist is writing about the glories of God's word, woven throughout is this silver thread that says, "God, help me. God, give me understanding. God, take me beyond my natural ability and impart understanding to me so that I can know your word more deeply than if you didn't help me."

So there is this humble spirit of dependence that marks the one who is truly studying God's word. Knowledge is good but knowledge puffs up. One of the ways that you avoid that puffing up is that you approach Scripture with a consistently prayerful spirit that says, "God, I'm weak, mortal, weak flesh and your word is high and lofty. There are profound things here that I want to know and see but, Lord, I have no special training for this. I realize that men dispute over these things, but I want to know. I want to understand. God, help me. God, be gracious to me so that I could grasp these things and know them and respond to them and respond to you in a deeper sense of worship." You see, at the core, at the very, very core of the one who would understand Scripture, is that you? Do you want to understand and know God's word? Understand that what Scripture models for you is someone who takes the position, consciously adopts the attitude of a humble learner, not a critic of God's word. You say, "God, I respect you. I revere you. I fear you. I love your word. I want to understand it. God, would you please help me?"

What's the Lord's response to that? "Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you." Jesus there as he's promising those kinds of things in Matthew 7, not talking about earthly blessings at all. Look, if God wrote his word to be understood, and he did, if he saved you to become like Christ, and if you're a Christian he did, and he put his Spirit inside you so that you could understand, and he did, then what is he going to do? I mean, God has made his purpose clear in those things. What is he going to do in response to the earnest, sincere, humble prayer of you as a Christian and you come and say, "God, I really want to know this word. Whatever it costs me, I want this word inside me. I want this to be a part of the fabric of my being. God, help me. Give me understanding that I might know your testimonies."

What's God going to do with a prayer like that? Do you know what he's going to do? He's going to answer it. He's going to give you understanding. I know some men in different parts of the country. To talk with them is incredible. Their depth of understanding of Scripture is profound and they never set foot in a seminary classroom. They've never had formal training, but they can discuss the attributes of God and the doctrines of grace with clarity and with insight. Why? Because this is what God gives to his people. This is what God imparts to those who love his word over time and seek it humbly as a learner serious about sanctification in their lives. Taking the time, arranging life around God's word.

You see, beloved, here's the thing: God gives understanding to the humble as a gift, not to the proud as an entitlement. God's word is open to you if you'll seek its treasure. Great

blessing awaits going forward, no matter what your past experience has been like. Scripture shows us that going forward you can be a man, a woman of the word. Everything is there for that to take place. Great blessing awaits. Won't you be that kind of Christian?

Let's pray together.

Our Father, open your word to us. What better way could we pray after a time like this than simply what has already been modeled to us in Scripture. Father, we are your servants. Give us understanding that we may know your testimonies. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.