

LIVING THE WORD FILLED LIFE: MAKING A SACRED VOW

MATTHEW 6:33

Join me in Matthew 6 and Jesus reminds us how to make life count for God.

This week, more than any other week, we can all sense time flying by. The old year is almost gone; the New Year is just in front us. In this spot, once each year we can see both the passing and the oncoming years more clearly than at any other time of the year.

Life continues to move in a river racing at 60 minutes per hour, but at the end of the year it seems clearer. Each minute is unstoppable and irreversible; but each minute is also redeemable and investable.

Time is our most precious commodity; and it measures the expenditure of our lives. I have decided and hope that you either have already, or will also choose:

Christ's Investment Strategy

As we open to Matthew 6:19, stop and put yourself out in the crowd. Jesus is speaking, He is so clear that no one is confused. He talks about life in such a way everyone understands.

Listen to His familiar words, but do so with perhaps an unfamiliar longing: ask God to stir within you a longing to do and not just hear these powerful words. In Matthew 6:19 Jesus asks all of us how we are doing at laying up the **treasure of time** invested in the Bank of Heaven. Jesus spoke so often about money, possessions and eternity. He told us:

Matthew 6:19-21 "Do not lay up for yourselves **treasures on earth**, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but lay up for yourselves **treasures in heaven**, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

As we look at the ever increasing opportunities, to invest the priceless time, streaming in what sometimes looks like an endless river: have you decided yet what will be your investment strategy for 2010?

Jesus has framed the wisest way to invest our precious river of time, in the words of one short verse at the end of this chapter of Matthew. Do you know yet what will be your choice when it comes to heeding Christ's clearest and simplest request?

Jesus reduced daily life down to one verse; and it is so easy that we don't have to remember much. This verse says it all.

Please stand, and imagine that you are in Galilee, Jesus is sitting on a hillside, and you feel like He's talking just to you. He is speaking to each of us today, if we will just stop and listen!

Matthew 6:33 But seek ye FIRST the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.

Pray

There is God's plan, the essence of spiritual life; and the key to all other blessings in life. Either we take it and obey, or leave it and ignore the reality that God has very high expectations for His children.

Do you know what He wants you to do in life? Here it is, simple enough for anyone to grasp: SEEK HIM FIRST. That means that Matthew 6:33 distills and puts at our finger tips, a one step guide in:

How to Live for God

Jesus asked us in this verse to seek FIRST: His mastery, and His control over every aspect of our life.

Seeking Christ should be our first priority as His disciples today, and is still the essence of Biblical Christianity. And, seeking first Christ's mastery, and supremacy over all of my life is what it means to be a true follower of Christ.

Jesus demonstrated what it took to make it in our spiritual lives by His wilderness temptation in Matthew 4:1-8. There He tells us we NEED God's Word every day! He said we live not just by eating food but also by eating His Word. If we are not living for God, there will be signs of spiritual immaturity. Some of those signs are:

1. A life filled with fear, anxiety, and the absence of peace; and a marginal desire for daily time in God's Word.
2. Limited desire for fellowship with other believers; and not actively assisting in the spiritual development of others.
3. Strong desire for worldly possessions; often driven by selfish ambitions; sometimes exhibiting a spirit of competition.
4. Lacking compassion for the lost.

5. Ongoing financial difficulties (living far beyond means, and in constant debt).
6. Partial and often brief victory over sin.
7. Nonexistent or lackluster prayer life.¹

Back up to Matthew 4:4. Jesus has already identified the fuel that keeps us seeking Him. He shared His own personal spiritual secret for earthly life: it is living by the Daily Word.

Spiritual people need God's daily Word as much as daily food. Planning time with God becomes as normal as thinking about when we will get our next meal. Just as much a part of life's daily plans as eating becomes, so should feeding on God's Word also become.

Just as a baby that never regularly eats will never grow and mature, and is considered sick; so any believer that doesn't regularly eat will not grow and mature, and is also sick. The key Jesus said in Matthew 6:33 is the priority: Seek God and His Word FIRST. That is the secret of:

Staying on Track With God

If we believe God's Word is the ultimate truth we are guided closer each day towards what God loves; but if we are strangers to His truth then we are drawn further away from what pleases Him, glorifies Him, and magnifies Him.

There are only two sources of wisdom—that which comes from God above and that which is from below and is not from God but is "earthly, unspiritual, and of the devil" (James 3:15, NIV). Where is your guidance coming from God or the Devil? Only God's Word is the unfailing source of all truth needed for obeying and pleasing God. If you are not being filled by God through His Word with His truth—then you are being filled with counterfeit truth, not from God, nor pleasing Him.

Jesus asked us to seek Him first, seek His mastery, and His control over every aspect of our life.

Why not start this New Year with a renewal of the consecration of your life to Christ? Why not come to Him and tell Him you want to seek His mastery, and control, and Lordship over every part of your life starting, right now? That type of consecration always starts with God's Word².

Have others things slowly taken over that "seeking first" of God in prayer and His Word? Is the Bible your FaceBook, do you seek to soak up His Face in His Book, as much as getting your FaceBook updated and all your news feed read?

¹ Doug Morrell, Wesley's 3-Strand Discipleship, May 18, 2005; <http://www.corediscipleship.org/index.html>

² It is the: Overcoming power Rev 12 'by the word of their testimony'; Engrafted Word: soul saving James 1, assuring soul of salvation; Sanctifying Word: John 17 life changing Word; Living and Abiding Word, not of corruptible seed; preserving/incorruptible; Comforting Word Rom 15; Guiding Word Psalm 119.105; Protecting/Defending Word Eph 6.

Jesus said we need every Word of God to live by (Mt 4:4). We could summarize our time in God's Word as our goals to: READ IT DAILY, TRUST IT COMPLETELY and OBEY IT ALWAYS. A consecrated believer has made the choice that God is first, most important, and never to be neglected. And that decision is reflected in the way they look on the Bible as:

The Book of Books

The Bible³ contains: 3.6 million letters; forming almost 811,000 words; arranged into over 31,000 verses; that make up the 1,189 chapters of the 66 books of the Bible. In the Old Testament there are 939 chapters in 39 books and in the New Testament there are 250 chapters in 27 books: and GOD wrote them all.

Yet, even though **half of all the books** in the Bible are no longer than two columns of a modern newspaper, many people have never read what God has to say. And even though it only takes 78 to 80 hours to read the Bible all the way through, many have only invested that amount of time in sports, hobbies, media, and personal pursuits, but never in finding God each day through His Word!

God's Word is a "divine library," and demands not only spiritual illumination, but also the practical application of reverent and diligent study methods in order to master its diversified subjects, as well as its unified message. The Bible Is Unique. It is the Book of Books, because it is the ONLY Book that God wrote.

It is a book⁴: written over a 1600 year span, covering over 60 generations.

- Written by 40 plus authors from every walk of the life including kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, scholars, etc. Moses, a political leader, trained in the universities of Egypt; Peter, a fisherman; Amos, a herdsman; Joshua, a military general; Nehemiah, a cup bearer; Daniel, a prime minister; Luke, a doctor; Solomon, a king; Matthew, a tax collector; Paul, a Rabbi.
- Written in different places: Moses in the wilderness; Jeremiah in a dungeon; Daniel on a hillside and in a palace; Paul inside prison walls; Luke while traveling; John on the Isle of Patmos;
- Written at different times: David in times of war; Solomon in times of peace;
- Written during different moods: Some writing from the heights of joy and others writing from the depths of sorrow and despair.

³ Phillips, EXPLORING BIBLE, P. 7

⁴ EVIDENCE THAT DEMANDS A VERDICT (p.18)

- Written on three continents: Asia, Africa and Europe; in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic and Koine Greek the international language at the time of Christ.

Our Bibles got their CHAPTER divisions in the 1200's by Stephen Langton the Archbishop of Canterbury; and our Bibles was divided into VERSES in 1550 by Robert Estienne, who fled for his life from France to Calvin in Switzerland.

Perhaps the primary goal of Satan is to keep you from the Word. He will use disinterest, discouragement and distraction or whatever else it takes. Why? Because the Word of God is powerful; and it will change you and me to look more like Jesus every time we look at it seriously. There are usually two reasons men give for not reading the Word of God:

1. No desire and
2. No time.

Anyone Has Time To Read the Bible

You are here, that equals desire. Let's destroy the no time myth.

Lt. General William K. Harrison⁵ was the most decorated soldier in the 30th Infantry Division, rated by General Eisenhower as the number one infantry division in World War II. General Harrison was the first American to enter Belgium, which he did at the head of the Allied forces. He received every decoration for valor except the Congressional Medal of Honor - being honored with the Distinguished Silver Cross, the Silver Star, the Bronze Star for Valor, and the Purple Heart (he was one of the few generals to be wounded in action).

When the Korean War began, he served as Chief of Staff in the United Nations Command - and because of his character and self-control was ultimately President Eisenhower's choice to head the long and tedious negotiations to end the war.

General Harrison was a soldier's soldier who led a busy, ultra-kinetic life, as also an amazing man of the Word. When he was a twenty-year-old Cadet, he began reading the Old Testament once a year and the New Testament four times. General Harrison did this until the end of his life.

Since it only takes about 80 hours to read the entire Bible, this program General Harrison began obligated him to just ½ hour of reading God's Word for each of the days of his life.

Let me ask you, do any of us have ½ an hour to give as an offering to God each day to cultivate the mind of Christ like General Harrison?

⁵ Hughes, Discipline of a godly man, p. 76-77.

How about 14 minutes a day to read every one of God's Words in the Bible in one year?

How about 3 minutes a day to get through the New Testament in a year?

		HOURS	MINUTES	@ DAY
READ BIBLE		80	4800	13
OLD TESTAMENT	77%	62	3695	10
NEW TESTAMENT	23%	18	1104	3
HARRISON				
OT	1	80	4800	13
NT	4	74	4419	12
MINUTES NEEDED		154	9219	25

Even in the thick of war General Harrison maintained his commitment by catching up during the two- and three-day respites for replacement and refitting which followed battles, so that when the war ended he was right on schedule.

When, at the age of ninety, his failing eyesight no longer permitted his discipline, he had read the Old Testament seventy times and the New Testament 280 times! No wonder his godliness and wisdom were proverbial, and that the Lord used him for eighteen fruitful years to lead Officers Christian Fellowship (OCF).

General Harrison's story tells us it is possible for the busiest of us, to systematically feed on God's Word. No one could be busier or lead a more demanding life than General Harrison. His life remains a demonstration of a mind programmed with God's Word.

His closest associates say that every area of his life (domestic, spiritual, and professional) and each of the great problems he faced was informed by the Scriptures. People marveled at his knowledge of the Bible and the ability to bring its light to every area of life.

Word Filled Lives Are Lives that Please God

General Harrison is an example of a person who lived out the experience of the Psalmist:

Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me. I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts. (119:97-100)

You must remember this: You can never have a Christian mind without reading the Scriptures regularly because you cannot be deeply influenced by that which you do not know. If you are filled with God's Word, your life can then be informed and directed by

God. He begins to guide and direct our marriage and family relations, our child-rearing, our career, our ethics, and our internal purity. The only way to a Christian mind is through God's Word!

But, this must never become a Bible-reading legalism, "good Christians must read the Bible through once a year." God never sets a quota for how much we must read daily or yearly.

Some of us simply cannot read well, retain vast amounts at one sitting, or even read very fast. Speed reading is not the answer to spiritual nurture and growth. As the cartoon character named Lucy once confessed to Charlie Brown:

"I just completed a course in speed reading and last night. I read War and Peace in one hour! It was about Russia."

We should decide that we are going to meet with God in His Word each day, and stay until we see Him and bow in worship asking for Him to plant the truth we read into our life that day. That means we can:

READ WITH ANTICIPATION IN 2010

Perhaps the most dangerous thing we could do for the status quo of spiritual life in America is to ask God to give us spiritual insights into His Word. Psalm 119:18 is a prayer to see the Lord in my everyday life.

It takes about 16 minutes to read the book of Ephesians out loud. Silently reading it takes maybe 6 minutes or so. Have you ever thought what would happen if you planned to read the Bible 15 minutes each day?

There are several suggestions that can make your time in the Word a time remembered.

First, start with anticipation. Do you still hold some of the feelings you felt when you began to know your girlfriend was becoming your wife? Each word, smile and moment took on new depth and richness. Her notes, cards and letters were mined repeatedly for treasures.

Anticipation can begin each time we read by asking God to Psalm 119:18 you! Only we can want opened eyes, only He can energize dim, weary and unseeing eyes into windows of anticipated blessing. Next, we should seek to:

READ AGGRESSIVELY IN 2010

Next, may I suggest we read aggressively? If you really want to get something as a man you must be selective and aggressive. In seeking the Lord in His Word we must decide we are going to plunge in and wade through all the obstacles and get to the goal.

What is the goal? Making Connection with God in His Word.

Would you cross the state to your favorite hunting or fishing spot and then turn around without taking a shot or casting your line? Never.

Would you get the snack, turn on the TV, adjust your chair sit down and then switch off the Super Bowl before it started? Only if you were going to the Calvary Bible Church evening service right?

But you know what I mean. We can't stop short of the goal. But in this area of the Word we often do just that. So we need aggression and anticipation all as a part of a plan to:

MAKE A SACRED VOW IN 2010

The Key is: read God's Word whether you feel like it or not. That means we make a sacred vow to God and make no exceptions. Dr Tim La Haye tells in his book on Bible study, about his lifelong collection of interviews of the greatest Bible teachers and missionaries of the past. He concludes that among them all he found that they had each at one time in their lives made a sacred vow, and then renewed it over and over again.

What is a sacred vow? Ecclesiastes 5:4 says it is a vow we make to the Lord that we keep.

When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow.

What was the vow these giants of the past made to the Lord? Simply this, each one, La Haye interviewed said, they had vowed to the Lord, "No Bible, no breakfast; and no Bible no bedtime".

In other words if getting up late, or an unexpected item or a child's sickness in the home, or whatever, stopped the daily pattern of beginning or ending the day with God, then no end of the day meal or bedtime until that appointment was kept. Simply that.

Kept up, the quiet time in God's Word will become a habit of life.

Where do we find that type of devotion to God's Word ?

- For missing meals try Job 23:12 "I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food".

- For missing bedtime until devotions try David in Psalm 132:4-5: I will not give sleep to my eyes, Or slumber to my eyelids, 5 Until I find a place for the LORD, A dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.”

START SOME NEW HABITS IN 2010

Here are some powerful principles for energizing your time in the Word:

- **EQUIVALENCE:** try a one-for-one ratio of TV and sports for the Word of God.
- **EXCELLENCE:** try picking the very best time in the day for the Word of God.
- **ENDURANCE:** try to stay with it until you hit treasure in the Word of God.
- **EXPECTANCE:** try to come looking for something in the Word of God.
- **ESSENCE:** try to ask God to help you find the key to unlock truths in the Word of God.
- **EFFERVESCENCE:** try to let it out when you do find riches in the Word of God.

Read is what it says.

Interpret is what it means.

Meditate is what do I do!

Some great hunting spots I’ve found:

- **TRACK DOWN KEY WORDS:** prayer, “in Christ”,
- **FOLLOW THE TRAIL OF KEY THEMES:** love, King, walk, stand,
- **PAINT THE FACES OF KEY HEROES OF THE FAITH:** David on the run, David as a young man,
- **CHART THE TIMES OF KEY EVENTS:** David’s sin, Solomon’s three books, Paul’s “press”
- **TRACE THE OUTLINE OF GOD’S KEY ATTRIBUTES:** try the Holy Spirit’s work in the Epistles,

Children's Story

- One of the most vivid periods of my life were those months smuggling Bibles into closed countries in the Moslem and Communist world of the 1970's and 1980's.
- Each trip last one or two weeks and we took in 1,800 Bibles. Everyone with a Bible here this morning hold them up. We took in 3x as many Bibles as you see, packed into a specially made car each trip. I packed them one at a time, praying over each one as I slid it into its spot.
- One story of God's Great Faithfulness is all I can share this morning.
- Let's say that together this morning: "Great is Thy Faithfulness, O God my Father".
- Polish apartment complex, delivery to maintenance man's garage in the center of the courtyard surrounded by 10 stories of apartments with balconies all facing inward.
- One arch way entrance/trash cans/lights/dog silenced/eyes turned Heavenward