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CENTERED IN THE WORD

The few Bibles had been in the hands only of church leaders. Now, while most people still couldn't read, more and more educated people were able to read it for themselves, and Luther urged them to do so. Here are some things he is quoted as saying about the Word of God:

"Let the man who would hear God speak, read Holy Scriptures."

"The Holy Spirit himself and God, the Creator of all things, is the Author of this book."

"I am afraid that the schools will prove the very gates of hell, unless they diligently labor in explaining the Holy Scriptures, and engraving them on the hearts of youth. I would advise no one to send his child where the Holy Scriptures are not supreme. Every institution in which men and women are not unceasingly occupied with the Word of God must be corrupt." (Retrieved March 31, 2017, from <https://givemethatbook.com/2010/01/19/martin-luther-his-quotes-on-scripture/>.)

Today, most of us have very little idea of what a marvelous thing it was to those people to have a Bible in their own town, written in their own language. Even if they couldn't read it for themselves, they could hear one of the educated people in their town read it. There are still places like this on earth, but in most places, we can easily obtain Bibles of our own, not only in our own language, but in several different versions—in simpler everyday language for people whose reading is not as advanced, for example.

In many homes today, there are a dozen Bibles, but they gather dust on a shelf, while in other places, people may still risk their lives to obtain even a piece of the Bible to read for themselves. Not that long ago, Bibles were illegal in many Communist countries, and people would smuggle small sections inside their clothing, or pass them from hand to hand under cover of darkness. People have been put to death just for reading and sharing the Word of God.

Do you have a Bible? Where is it? How much does it mean to you? How often do you spend time with it?

Are you centered in the Word of God?

DEVOTION

The Bible is an amazing piece of literature. Here is this little collection of 66 books written by about 40 people over the course of ten or more centuries, and yet it has been kept together in mostly the same format all these centuries. It is treasured by billions of people, and has had more influence over human civilization than any other book in history. It speaks to people of every color, age, and station, people who live in jungles, or deserts, or great cities, people who wear every possible kind of clothing and live every lifestyle known to humanity. How is this possible?

We believe it would not be humanly possible. We believe that God has had His hand over His word throughout all its vicissitudes and translations and paraphrases. There is enough in any Bible to enable any person to come to a saving knowledge of the great Creator who loves them and gave everything to save them.

Yet the Bible can be confusing, too. It has been misused to hurt all too many people, in the name of God. People have been tortured and killed because their reading of the Bible disagreed with the interpretation of someone in power. That's exactly what happened to the reformers. Many were killed, and Luther almost was.

Why? With what attitude must we read Scriptures in order to allow the Holy Spirit to have His way with the forming and reforming of our souls, rather than trying to use and mold the Scriptures to fit our notions and desire for power?

The Bible was written by human beings, led by God. Each person had a unique personality and experience, and they brought different styles and different interests to what they wrote. Some people worry about this, because it seems to them that different parts of the Bible "disagree" with each other. In fact, this is exactly what makes this small collection the Living Word of God: it speaks eternal, unchanging truths in changing languages and differing imagery, so that everyone on earth can hear God speaking for herself or himself. Praise the Lord for the wisdom that used all that variety to speak to all hearts!

Take a moment to do a small survey. Ask each person in the meeting what his or her favorite part of the Bible is, and why. You may like to have a scribe record the differences. You may discover that the very thing that

makes one person treasure one part of Scripture makes another confused or disturbed, and the part that person likes, someone else doesn't.

Read or have read 2 Timothy 3:14-17. Write down the statements that are made about the Word of God and why it can be trusted. Then make a separate list of what the Scriptures, if studied, will accomplish in an individual life.

Together, create a prayer that asks for humility and for God's wisdom in each heart as each one studies God's Word and seeks to have his/her life molded by it.

ACTIVITY SUGGESTION

1. Take several Bibles in different versions, and choose a passage or chapter, such as 1 Corinthians 13 or Isaiah 53, or any favorite passage, and read it together in different versions. It is even better if you have people who can read in different languages.
2. Compare and contrast and find out how many extra blessings and insights you can find by putting together all you find and talking the ideas out with all the different minds in the room.

SEVEN DAYS OF SOUL FOOD

SEVEN DAYS' WORTH OF DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

You must love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind (Luke 10:27). To put it another way, body + heart + mind = one living soul.

We can't really divide ourselves into different sections, but it's useful to look at these different aspects of ourselves and be sure we have a well-balanced faith that uses all the avenues of a soul. Each of these starter kits will include a week's worth of food for your soul in each of these four methods of understanding and expression.

Write about each of the following in your prayer journal this week. Strive to use language of emotions, thought, physical health and strength, or spirit on the given days.

DAY ONE: This week we will do something different. For several months now, we have been learning more and more about the power of God's Word to work reformation and transformation in our lives. You have been encouraged more and more to create your own private devotional time and grow in grace. So this week, instead of giving you Scriptures to look at, this lesson will help you to look more deeply into your own favorites. To begin, which Scripture did you say was your favorite during the meeting this week? Reread that one, in context, asking God to show you deeper themes than you have seen before. Then, you could branch out into other passages as well. Try it with passages you are not comfortable with, or are confused about. You might be surprised how God will lead you.

DAY TWO: *Heart:* Beginning with your favorite passage, (going on to others if you wish) search out the parts that touch your emotions. Prayerfully connect with these emotional themes and consider how God wants to work in your heart this week.

DAY THREE: *Mind:* In what ways does this passage stretch or grow your mind? How does God want to work in your mind this week?

DAY FOUR: *Strength/body*: Are there ways in which this favorite passage speaks to your physical health and strength? If not, can you find a passage that does? What are the ways God wants to strengthen your body this week?

DAY FIVE: *Soul/spirit*: As you prayerfully ponder the heart/mind/body insights God has given you so far this week, the Holy Spirit wants to lead you both more deeply into familiar parts of the Bible, and also more broadly, into parts you may not be as familiar with. Write in your prayer journal about what you are learning and how it affects your daily life.

DAY SIX: How can you show love to your family, community, and church through what you have learned this week?

DAY SEVEN: Use day 7 to create something beautiful that reflects what you have learned.

- Write a poem or song or story.
- Create a poster.
- Write a letter.
- Paint or draw a picture.
- Make a sign.
- Do some sidewalk chalk art or writings.
- Build something.
- Create a podcast or blog post or Twitter post(s).
- Make food and give it to someone in need.

Use whatever creativity God has given *you*. We all have something.

Share the love!

a short skit

THE STORIES AS TOLD TO LUKE

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Skit

10-15 minutes or as long as you like to take

We will do something different again this week. You will be the co-creators of an easy skit.

One of the people who gathered stories to write a gospel was Luke, the doctor who traveled with Paul. If you compare Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-2, you will see that he considered Acts a kind of Part Two to his gospel, which is the longest one and contains lots of stories that are not in the others. For one thing, there are more stories about women than there are in the others. Scholars think this could be because, as a doctor, Luke had more contact with women than most men had, though of course he treated men as well, and many of his stories came from men.

1. You only need one chosen character for this skit: Luke.
2. As many others as would like to participate should find a story they like in the gospel of Luke and pretend it happened to them or someone they know.
3. One at a time, each person tells a brief version of their story to Luke, who asks questions and pretends to be writing down what they say.

Here are some examples of stories that are only found in Luke's gospel (though you can use any story you like from it.)

1. Details of John the Baptist's and Jesus' birth. Mary the mother of Jesus probably told these to Luke. (Luke 1 and 2)

2. Anna and Simeon bless baby Jesus.
(Luke 2:25-38)
3. The Good Samaritan. (Luke 10)
4. Mary and Martha at home. (Luke 10)
5. Woman healed of being bent over 18 years.
(Luke 13)
6. The three parables in Luke 15: lost coin,
lost sheep, and prodigal son.

You can find many more. As you play the part of the Bible character, **use your imagination in telling "Luke" how these events affected you.** Also, **the person who plays Luke should use his imagination in asking questions Luke might have asked.**

TIMING:

1. If you want many people to play a part, appoint a timekeeper and only take a minute or two on each story.
2. Alternatively, if you want to go deeply into fewer stories, either set aside more time, or choose only 2-3 stories.