

Bible Study For Spiritual Power

"If ye abide in My word then are ye truly My disciples."

By J. R. Mott

Found in the 1894 Northfield Echoes (Volume 1), a report of the Northfield Conferences for 1894. These conferences featured many well-known Christian leaders such as D. L. Moody, A. J. Gordon, Andrew Murray, J. Wilbur Chapman, F. B. Meyer, C. T. Studd, and many others.

Let us first consider the IMPORTANCE OF BIBLE STUDY for a man's spiritual life, first to us as Christians. Right at the threshold, I would like to place, from the Word of God, one of the most essential tests of discipleship, "If ye abide in My word then are ye truly My disciples."

If a man wants to know the needs and possibilities of his own spiritual life, such Bible study is essential. There are many men in our colleges today who are conscientiously doing wrong; they never have listened to that commanded of Jesus Christ, "Take heed that the light which is in thee be not darkness." How a man is to know his own shortcomings, his own spiritual needs, and his own weaknesses without such Bible study is inconceivable, for that is the only book which shows us what we are, not only our needs but our possibilities. There are too many men who are content to live in the valley or to roam about among the foothills, who might be climbing upon the peaks of the higher Christian experience. We might say that the only way for a man to overcome doubts and temptations and passions, evil imaginations, unclean, unholy, and proud thoughts, is through such Bible study applied to his own life to purify and to meet this terrible conflict.

If we want to live more than ordinary spiritual lives as Christian men, it is necessary that we be great feeders upon the Word of God, which is not only quick but powerful. De Quincey divided all literature into the literature of knowledge and the literature of power - this is pre-eminently the literature of power. "If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will and it shall be done unto you." And still further, we might make this additional statement, that without spiritual Bible study, other spiritual helps may often lead us in danger, and ultimately they may be abandoned. Take the matter of meditation; without the Bible, meditation may lead a man to morbid introspection. Secret prayer is not a monologue, but is a dialogue.

But we might feel the importance of Bible study, secondly, not merely as Christian men, but as Christian teachers. I love to think of this conference where we are as a Bible school pre-eminently, and not only that, but a normal Bible school. I hope that a large number of the men here are purposing in their hearts to teach Bible classes; perhaps during the summer vacation, but certainly as you go back to college, though it may be to a class of but two or three that meets in your room. The



importance of personal Bible study of a spiritual character is seen in classes like this. What teacher helps you most in things intellectual or spiritual? Was it not the man who had the life behind the teaching? If a man is going to be sincere it is absolutely essential. As I travel among the colleges, especially those that have an elective system, I notice that the students would rather drink from the running stream than from a stagnant pool. If we want to be teachers that men will follow and hear with enthusiasm we must be growing. If a man strikes a rich vein himself he will set all his scholars to digging. If you would hold the interest and enthusiasm and the attendance of your Bible classes, center on your own spiritual life. If you want power to move that class center there.

In the third place, there is the importance of such Bible study for us as Christian workers. Would you work without friction, without worrying, without strain, and without anxiety? I know there are some men here who want to learn that secret. The wheels must be oiled by these words in the heart and in the life. Would you be kept from becoming mechanical? It may be that this is our greatest need in our associations, and therefore there is great need of our having the realities of this Bible constantly in our thoughts and minds, and of having the fullest experience, the richest experience day by day, otherwise our work may become unsuccessful and purely mechanical; we may work from a sense of duty, with no life in it. If you would make the environment around you and shape the work with a strong hand, and not simply be shaped and driven by it, build up a rich, full inner life. Then if a man is to have fruits in his work, it is necessary that in his thought and plan of study he put his spiritual life first. By our fruits we are known. The condition of fruitfulness is abiding in Christ, and one of the fundamental conditions is abiding in His Word.

We notice in the fourth place the importance of this kind of Bible study to us as individual men, not only as Christians, as Christian teachers and Christian workers, but as Christian leaders. That is what this conference stands for, still further. If a man is to have a spiritual association he must be spiritual. It is impossible for the stream to rise above the fountain; moreover, if we would be successful leaders we must study with great intensity the mind of Jesus Christ only revealed here in His Word, and the will of God, which is after all the supreme study. There is a deeper truth that stirs me at times, and that is if we are going to have the true secret of Christian leadership we must study that leader of Christian leaders, Jesus Christ. There we find the secret that He came not to be ministered unto; He went about as one that served, He taught that he who would be greatest must be the servant of all; that is the secret of enduring leadership in things spiritual.

So much for the importance of Bible study for our own spiritual life; might we not pause a moment on some of the HINDRANCES, so called? And in the first place let us consider that so called hindrance - I would call it an excuse - lack of time. I only need to say that there is time to do the will of God, and there is time to keep alive spiritually. Experience proves that the man who puts this first and keeps it first does not suffer in other things; that is the practical test. There is another hindrance that is more real, preoccupation. See college men often, who say, "I am studying the Bible with other thoughts in mind." One man says, "I am studying the Bible to get an intellectual knowledge of its contents, and isn't that sufficient?" A man may know the whole machinery of the Bible and not know its message to him; I may know all the facts about Jesus Christ, and not know Jesus Christ as my Saviour and constant companion. Another man says: "I am teaching the Bible, I am teaching a devotional group; that ought to do for me." If a man first studies those lessons with reference to his own life, and shuts out the thought of the class, it might do, but if his first thought is the class, and how he will teach that lesson, he is on the wrong track. You have your own particular spiritual needs, they may not be the needs of the class; and besides you need to have God speak to you every day. Another test is removing the incentive. Suppose the term breaks up and you go home, there is great danger that when the incentive is removed the man will stop the study.

There is another hindrance brought forward by a great many Christian people-substituting devotional books. They say, "I am studying devotional books along with my intellectual study, and isn't that a substitute?" I leave it to anyone whether it is a substitute." The most appealing tones in these books are but echoes of the voice of the Bible. We put a great deal of stress on going to first sources in history and in science, and why not go to first sources in things spiritual? Another instance which I think is a real one is found in our own lives. Do you lack delight in Bible study? Do you lack desire for this kind of Bible study? Does your pride tell you that you may be humbled? Does something tell you that if you listen to the voice of God He will lead you away from the calling you are marking out for yourself? Is there any secret thing with thee that keeps thee from this habit of spiritual Bible study, the daily application to it in your life? More perhaps are kept from it by lack of a suitable course.

I would like to speak of a few SUGGESTIVE COURSES which I have drawn largely from some of the most spiritual of Bible students. First, a man ought, if possible, before this to have understood the construction of the book, its contents, its measures, and its purpose; in fact, if a man could have studied the Bible as a whole in advance, he would be a much safer man to use it devotionally.

Another line which I have been trying in the last two months is to study "The messages of the epistles to me." This is in part book study. You can just take your Bible and have little slips in it and have, for example, on one slip, the life of Christ, everything in that epistle which He speaks to you, and after that His inner life, His outer life and His relation to the others; on another slip, all in that epistle on the Christian life, inner and outer, and on another slip, the writer's life in Christ, keeping in mind all the while the life of Christ, and what it teaches you. Keep these in mind as you look at Christ in that epistle, and then look at the direct indications and instructions to you as a Christian, in your outer or inner life.

For another course of studying the Bible, take it in biographical sections. What inspiration would come into our associations if we had several classes spending a month on each of these characters - Moses, Elijah, David, Daniel, John, Peter, Timothy, and Paul, taking an outline as simple as this: The thoughts, lines and purposes of their lives; the motives that actuated them; the difficulties that they encountered; their achievements for God, and the elements of success in their lives. You can adapt it to a few minutes every day.

Then we may study it topically. For two years I have taken this topic, "Christ as a pattern for me as a worker." For most of us it would take several lives to finish that study. The headings are these: His preparation for His work - we all need that; His call for His work - we need that; the field where He worked; the nature of His work; the manner in which He worked; the spirit in which He worked; the opposition to His work; the achievements of enduring success in His life as a worker. Other courses are Mr. Speer's "Evidences of Christ's Divinity," or Mr. McConaughy's "Christ Among Men," or that which Professor Drummond suggested, "The Kingdom of God," or "The Will of God." A man cannot know the will of God unless he saturates himself with the will of God. Mark out a course for yourself, break it up into convenient divisions, and hold to it; you may be discouraged in ten days, but hold to it. It will begin to tell on your life in a month's time.

Now we will pass on to notice in the fourth place the MANNER OF SUCH STUDY, drawn from the experience of students of the Bible. In the first place, be alone where possible, in order that you may speak out loud in your room without interruption. Again, let there be resolute detachment of mind. You may have only ten minutes a day for this kind of study, but you don't want to spend ten minutes getting keyed up, you want to turn to your study instantly and hear the voice of God the very first thing. Another suggestion, don't be sidetracked. That is the great peril, especially among college men. They come to questions and difficulties and think they must look them up at once.

Make a list of those things on a sheet of paper, but remember that those ten minutes, or that half hour better, is to meet our needs for this day, to equip us for this day spiritually. Then again be thorough, and record results. Some may not attach as much importance to that, but to my mind it is very important. Record results, even if you don't get but one point a day. One point a day in the course of a year will give a man a gold mine; one little leading of the spirit a day would enrich a life. The last suggestion would be meditate, without meditation such Bible study may be of no effect. Jeremiah said, "Thy words were found and I did eat them."

In the fifth place I would speak of the SPIRIT in which we should carry on such study: First of all it ought to be an intense spirit, secondly a childlike spirit, and closely akin to that is the spirit of dependence upon the Holy Ghost. The Holy Spirit must interpret what the Holy Spirit has inspired. If a man is going to take in the deep things of God he must repeat over many times that prayer, "Open Thou mine eyes, I cannot open them myself." Closely akin to that it should be a prayerful spirit. And then let it be an obedient spirit, and again, a practical spirit.

In the sixth place I would speak of the TIME. We should fix an hour, a regular time, and hold to it as the laws of the Medes and Persians were held to. Again, let it be daily. Too many students are doing their Bible study on one or two days of the week. The world pulls me down daily, self asserts itself more than once a day in my life, and the devil is laying more than one snare each day to entrap me; and therefore a man ought to fortify his life at least once a day if he is going to win the battle. Also it ought to be unhurried time. Oh, how much we need that! It takes time to be spiritual, it doesn't happen. Let it not only be an unhurried time, but an uninterrupted time. You say that is difficult. David Brainerd found it difficult at Yale, but he managed to get alone, and often he would memorize passages of Scripture and would go among the snowdrifts that he might be alone to meditate and to absorb the truth. Hudson Taylor told us in 1888 here at Northfield how he found time to be alone; he said: "I adopted this plan in China, of getting up at two o'clock in the morning to study the Bible, and then retiring again in order that I might be absolutely alone and uninterrupted." We can be alone. Let it be the choicest time of the day. Each man must determine for himself; for some it would be the last thing at night; for some the first thing after dinner; for most of us it would be the first thing in the day. The mind is less occupied in the morning, and is clearer, and the "memory as a rule is more retentive in the morning; and again, and this is the big reason, it prepares the man for his daily fight with self, sin, and Satan; before he is half through he is ready for the fight. Some of you remember those words of Ruskin, "Study the Bible, making it your first daily business to understand some portion of it, and then your business the rest of the day to see that you obey what you understand." John Wesley used to rise at four o'clock and spend two hours in Bible study and prayer and meditation, and the saintly Rutherford used to rise early and spend the first hour of the day in the same way. And above all, you remember Jesus Christ rising a great while before it was yet day. What He found necessary, you and I will find necessary for us.

Do you have a longing this morning for a richer, more abundant life? Then let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Shall we have these great spiritual awakenings this next year all over this country and Canada? Then let us realize in our lives Christ's promise that out of your inmost selves shall flow Jordans of living water.

Spirituality costs. Shall we pay what it costs? May the Spirit of God help us to answer that question.