

christian

WORKER



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

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BOOKS TO MAXIMIZE SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Mike Vestal

Books about the Bible are great and certainly have their place; however they are not substitutes for the word of God itself. Master the Book! To truly maximize spiritual growth, a child of God should deeply desire to get into Scripture (1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18). As an example, the New Testament can be read in its entirety four times a year by simply reading three chapters a day. Think about the benefits of such a practice, especially if blessed with the opportunity to do it for years!

There are also many great books by brethren that will richly repay your investment in reading them. Here's a few suggestions that will enrich your life and encourage your growth. They are mentioned in no particular order, along with the caveat that mention of an author or a book does NOT indicate endorsement of every position they hold or may have at some point held.

Questions and Answers to the Open Forum, by Guy N Woods (2 Volumes). The product of years of brother Woods conducting the Open Forum at Freed-Hardeman University during their annual lectureship, the breadth of material covered in these volumes simply is incredible. Even if one disagrees with brother Woods on an occasional point or two, the work has stood the test of time and blessed thousands of Christians. You will greatly profit from it too.

Know Your Bible, by Frank Dunn. One of the very best books of its type, the work provides an excellent overview of each book of the Bible. Taking the time to devour this book will significantly enhance one's overall understanding of God's word. The chapters are generally brief enough to use for regular devotional study.

Christ In the Home, by Robert R. Taylor. I first became acquainted with this book on the home and family 30 plus years ago when it was published by Baker Book House. It has gone through multiple printings, and I trust that it will still be available for years to come. It is vintage brother Taylor - Scripture filled, user friendly, eminently practical, and Christ exalting.

Search For the Ancient Order, by Earl I. West (multiple volumes). Whether one is a history buff or not, these books marvelously chronicle the history of the American Restoration Movement. Many of the leading people and events involved in the desire to restore New

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Editor

Cody Westbrook



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SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDYING THE BIBLE THIS YEAR

Cody Westbrook

Spiritual growth is impossible without God's word (1 Pet. 2:2). The bible tells us to study (2 Tim. 2:15) and meditate (Ps. 1) on God's word on a regular basis. David said "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Ps. 119:11). Because bible study is so important, it is also important that we know how to study effectively. Here are some suggestions that may help your personal bible study in the year(s) to come.

Utilize a bible-reading plan. It is true that there is a difference between reading and studying but it is also true that the two depend greatly upon one another. The benefits of reading the bible are many and Christians should dedicate time to read God's revealed will daily (c.f. Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; John 20:31; Ps. 119:97-104). There are a number of systematic bible-reading plans available. Some take you through the bible chronologically and others topically. Consider contacting WVBS to ask about their yearly bible-reading plan or accessing one through the bible app on your smart phone.

Be convinced of the need to study. It is possible for us to spend time in God's word that is completely fruitless. If our heart is not in it then it will be completely unprofitable. We must be convinced and convicted that studying God's word is vital to spiritual success; otherwise we will never devote ourselves to it as we should. We must remember what God told Israel in Deuteronomy 6:6-15. We must be like Ezra, who "prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:10).

Make it a daily habit. Those in Berea were nobler than those in Thessalonica because they "received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched

the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). In order to truly be a diligent bible student, we must invest ourselves in studying it every day. Designate a time during your day to open the scripture to read and meditate. Turn off the TV, silence your cell phone, and concentrate on God's word. Make it a non-negotiable priority. One who is truly blessed is one who "meditates on God's word both day and night" (Ps. 1).

Memorize scripture. The only way to truly hide God's word in our hearts is to memorize it. Admittedly, memorization is easier for some than others, but everyone can do it. Start by memorizing one passage per day. Write it down on a piece of paper or an index card and take it with you wherever you go throughout the day. Read it routinely and recite it aloud. There are a number of different methods and even websites and phone apps that will help with this process. Remember, the key to memorization is repetition.

Emphasize meditation. Bible meditation is defined beautifully in Psalm 1. There are two parts. First, chew on the passage. Memorize it, read it, and think about it over and over again. Ask questions about the passage, look of the definition of words, and see how it fits in context. Second, actively look for ways to make application. For example, if you're studying a passage about proper use of the tongue, look for opportunities during the day to use your tongue for good, like expressing thanksgiving to someone or offering a word of encouragement. The key to proper meditation is answering two questions: "What does it mean?" and "How do I apply it?"

Study topically. Choose a topic like love, joy, or peace. Get out a pen and a notepad, then open up the bible and look for passages that deal with

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that topic. Write the passages down and categorize them. Once you have finished that step, organize your notes to see the full picture of how the bible discusses the topic. Then commence meditation.

Study textually. Choose a text. It can be a small section, like a parable, an entire chapter, or a book. Read it several times (preferably aloud). Look for key words and phrases. Look for passages to memorize. Look for transition words like “therefore,” and petition verbs like “urge” and “beg.” Ask questions about the text. What is the historical background? What is the main idea of the text? What is main point being emphasized?

Add variety. Consider devoting each month to a new study. Chose topics, themes, or books to work through. Utilize sound brotherhood study resources like The Christian Courier, WVBS, The Gospel Journal, Sain Publications, The Colley House, and others to help you along the way. Keep study notes and refer back to them throughout the year. You may be surprised to see how much your bible knowledge can grow.

The New Year is now upon us, which means new goals, plans, and ambitions. But, the most important thing to consider this year, and every year, is spiritual growth. Therefore, this Christian Worker edition is submitted to you with the hope that it will provide a number of practical ways that you and your family can grow spiritually in 2018. We pray that it accomplishes its purpose.

CW

SIX TOOLS TO IMPROVE YOUR PRAYER LIFE

Andy Baker

Tool #1: Practice

It is comforting to know that prayer is a learned behavior (Luke 11:1). It is also comforting to know that nobody, save Jesus, is an expert at prayer (Luke 11:2-13). However, scripture is clear that God expects people to pray (cf. Matt. 6:5; Col. 4:2; Luke 18:1; I Thess. 5:17). Thus, if it is something Christians are expected to do, getting in and actually doing it is important! A prayer does not have to

be long or eloquent to be effective (Neh. 5:19; Matt. 6:7-8; Luke 18:9-14). Maturing in prayer life will find us developing the discipline of prayer so that we turn to God first in our lives when joys or sorrows or anything prevails (Jas. 5:13; 1 Pet. 5:6-7).

Tool #2: Pattern

Studying the prayer life of Jesus or some of the great heroes of faith like David, Nehemiah, Daniel, or Paul will help in gaining an understanding about the who, what, when, where, why, and how of prayer. Nehemiah, it seems, was skilled in seamlessly weaving prayers into his daily work and calling upon the Lord for His blessing in big and small challenges (Neh. 5:19). Praying while driving, cooking, working, and relaxing are great. So too, praying while withdrawing, reflecting, meditating, and worshipping are part of the pattern of spiritual people.

Tool #3: Posture

Sometimes the standard posture, “let us bow our heads and close our eyes” can be more of a hinderance than it can a help. When the body needs sleep, bowing can quickly become nodding! Sometimes when David prayed, he laid prostrate on the ground (2 Sam. 12:15-16). Some stood, some knelt, while others sat (Dan. 6:10; 1 Kings 19:4; Acts 20:6; Neh. 8:4-6). Jesus often looked up towards heaven (Mark 6:41). With prayer, it may not always be helpful to bow the head and close the eyes to keep the heart focused on petitioning the God of heaven. When praying privately, there is wisdom in considering these other prayer postures.

Tool #4: Planning

Jesus always had time and made time to pray, even when the busyness of life was pressing about Him. In fact, He would often retreat by Himself and spend time with His Father in prayer (Mark 1:35; 14:35; 5:16; 9:18). Daniel made a habit of praying three times a day, so much so, that his enemies knew his prayer life was a constant in his life (Dan. 6:10). For someone wanting to improve his/her prayer life: set an alarm on the phone or on the computer, retreat away from the daily grind, and plan to spend scheduled, meaningful time talking to Our Father in heaven.

Tool #5: Program

What do I pray for? I would pray, but I don't know what to say! For folks like these, begin with the question Jesus asked blind Bartimaeus, “What

do you want Me to do for you” (Mark 10:51)? What pressing concerns can God address? What weights can God lighten? Bible reading and praying scripture to God is a great program as well. When the heart is overwhelmed, happy and comforted is the person who can pray Psalm 61 back to God. As a practical note, “Echo” is a free prayer app that a person can list their personal prayer requests and the app will keep those for remembering throughout the day (See Tool #4).

Tool #6: Fasting

Fasting can help focus prayer in a powerful way (cf. Ex. 24:18; 2 Chr. 20:1-ff; Est. 4:16; Mat. 4:1; Acts 13:1-3). Fasting is stopping a daily function of life to devote all attention to petitioning God, attending to the things of God, doing all to the glory of God (see Matt 6:9-13; Jas. 4:8-10; 1 Cor. 10:31). Food is a basic need, however, so is prayer and feeding on the word of God (Matt. 4:1-4). When Christians abstain from food (or any regular activity) for the sole purpose of drawing nearer to God, it will help put a person’s priorities in perspective (cf. Lam. 3:24). Fasting is not so God gives more weight to those prayers, rather, prayers coupled with fasting will remind Christians who is ultimately in control.

CW

HOW TO EXCEL IN PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Rob Whitacre

The churches of Christ in America are on a steady decline. Over the past three years, we have lost 325 congregations and 55,334 members. Those who seek RATIONALIZATION minimize our losses by pointing to similar declines among our denominational friends. Those who seek EXPLANATION (should we dare say excuses) cite increased distractions, entertainment, secularization, busyness, and muchness. While all of these things may be true, it does not change the numbers. The only way to address this crisis is by EVANGELIZATION! If churches of Christ are going to survive in America, we MUST return to our roots and once again train the saved to teach the lost.

Unfortunately, at least two generations have risen who know not evangelism. We have children who

have grown up in homes and have never seen their parents conduct a personal Bible. Remaining still is a generation who remembers a time when churches grew. Christians carried around a film projector in the trunk of their car and showed their family, friends, and neighbors the Jewell Miller Bible study series. We “were” the fastest growing religious body in America. We excelled at soul winning! I believe those days can return if we train the saved. “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2). Here are four proven Biblical things we can do to help turn things around.

1. Invite people into our HOME: “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:42) Have we forgotten that our homes are a tool for bringing souls to Christ. The mat in front of too many Christian doors reads “Come Back Later” instead of “Welcome.” Open homes equal open hearts. Our first century brethren had open homes. They were eating together, praying together, and studying together (Acts 2:46; 20:20). We have found that over 90% of those we engage in Bible study from our home obey the Gospel.

2. Extend Christian HOSPITALITY: I am afraid that this Christian attribute is almost lost in modern America. Hospitality is defined as “love of strangers.” The Greek word is used in Hebrews 13:2, “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” All Christians are commanded to display hospitality, and elders are to be proven in this qualification (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8). Our hospitality to others should never be the reason behind their Gospel obedience, but the lack thereof could be the reason they don’t obey.

3. When the lost sit in our homes, HEARKEN: Everyone wants to be heard. James said, “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (1:19). Spend a lot of time asking about their family, hobbies, past experiences, and things they enjoy. This is a time to find common ground and to develop friendship and trust. As you listen, take mental notes of things that may need emphasized during a study. Have they been divorced? Do they have any organized religious background? Do they have family who are devout in any particular religion?

4. When the lost say things for which we disagree, HESITATE: It is very IMPORANT as you listen to

never chase rabbits. This is not the time to refute, reprove, rebuke, or instruct, regardless of what is said. Remember, you are building a relationship. Furthermore, don't answer all their questions. I know this is a strange suggestion and may even seem rude. Believe me, it has taken a long time to understand the power of hesitation. If we truly respect the power of the Word, we must stop telling everyone what we think and how we FEEL and start SHOWING them the truth. The quicker we get someone into the Bible, the sooner God can begin working on their hearts. If someone says, "Why don't you use a piano in worship?" you need to say, "That is a great question, let me SHOW you!" This is an effective way to lead into a Bible study.

We literally have hundreds of thousands of untrained Christians in our pews. We still have enough soldiers to begin growing again. If a doctor found his patient hemorrhaging, he would act immediately to save his life. Congregations are hemorrhaging, and if we don't act now, we may need other countries to send missionaries here to reestablish the Lord's Church in America.

Rob, in cooperation of World Video Bible School and the Gospel Broadcasting Network has put together a new series training Christians how to be soul winners. It is a two volume set. If you are interested please send him an email at rnjh.whitacre@gmail.com. He also conducts Personal Evangelism seminars training churches how to conduct personal Bible studies.

CW

STRATEGIES FOR HELPING YOUR CHILDREN GROW SPIRITUALLY

Glenn Colley

Paul taught Dad's to "not provoke your children to wrath," (Eph. 6:4), and "do not provoke your children lest they become discouraged," (Col. 3:21). It's probably noteworthy that two of the things that make parents lose sleep are teens who are full of anger and those who are depressed. Our actions can DIS-courage our children rather than EN-courage them. Rather than spur them on, we may actually drag them down or hold them back.

Besides several obvious things Christian parents can do to rear their children to be faithful Christians, such as faithful participation in Bible class and worship, living a good example before them, etc., there is one daily investment that yields a wealth

of spiritual dividends. It's a daily time together centered on the Word. It's family Bible time.

It has to be every night.

This has to be done every night, even if some nights feature shorter Bible time. Why? Because if you don't, pretty soon you've skipped a month and the effort loses its steam. Remember the words of Deuteronomy 6:6-7:

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

My wife and I didn't get everything right, but both of our adult children say this ritual is in the top three things they think helped them to be faithful. Beg your children to commit to doing this when they grow up. Pass the torch.

It has to have lots of variety.

Find creative ways to assign memorizing Scripture. We offer a CD or download of four different tools called "Hannah's 100," which is 100 verses of Scripture set to music for children of any age. A father told me recently that he sat with his family and began reading the book of James. His children, who had been listening to Hannah's 100 IV, immediately burst into song, singing all the verses of chapter 1!

Lads to Leaders is a great program, and features an event called, "Centurion of Scripture." It means that a student (and parents too if they will!) memorize 100 verses of Scripture during the course of one year and say them in blocks of ten, fifty, or all one hundred at once. Set practical goals for your children to help motivate them to memorize the Bible. If, for example you're planning a trip to the Space and Rocket Museum this summer, why not begin three or four months in advance and say, "We will go to the Space and Rocket Museum for vacation this year if we all can memorize 100 verses before time to go! We'll all do it together." Make one list that is age appropriate, and have all the family work on that same list of Scriptures.

Play games. Board games work well if a child must quote a verse before getting to roll the dice. Play a Bible version of 20 questions. Play "Simon Says" except make the children answer a Bible question before they get to advance. Create a Bible

scavenger hunt. Clues throughout the house require looking up a verse to find the subsequent hint.

Buy a couple of good Bible storybooks (Egermeier's or Sain Publications, Palma Smiley materials for toddlers, etc.). Write notes and make gifts for missionaries, elderly saints in the church, or notes to encourage children who did well at Lads. Write thank you notes with verses to your elders. One night, prepare food pertaining to Bible culture--make a food that goes with a story. Let them eat the food while you tell them about the Bible account. Go to westhuntsville.org and download the free Kidding cards of Bible facts and use them in the games you play. Order a copy of Picking Melons and Mates, which has a "story-time starter kit" of 21 days of Bible Story Time for all ages. (You will have to tell them where.)

It is best when it often comes from Daddy's List-Dad, create a "What I Want Them to Know" list which includes Biblical doctrines and life values and once or twice a week begin your story time with, "Tonight I want to teach you what God's book says about..." and pull one item from your list. At this time teach them about the importance of the cross, the singular nature of the church, creation in six literal days, worship, property rights, how to select a great spouse, saving sex for marriage, avoidance of alcohol and other drugs, the value of honesty and hard work that is a prerequisite to eating, etc., etc.

Don't stress over this, just do it. The best time to start was before they were born. The second best time to start is tonight. God bless you in the greatest challenge of your life: rearing children to be strong Christians as adults.

CW

How to Strengthen Your Marriage this Year

John W. Moore

Your marriage can be great! It doesn't have to be mediocre, status quo, or just existing out of duty. Some marriages can become stagnate and frail; husband and wife easily falling prey to temptation and hurt, with consequences that may lead to the tragedy of divorce. Others outwardly may appear to

be solid at the moment but after hardship and trial, the spouses find their relationship wasn't nearly as strong as they had hoped. Satan never tires of seeking to destroy marriages, so what can we do to strengthen the bond with our spouses to ensure lasting spiritual well-being, contentment, peace, and happiness? The following are a few practical and proven points:

1. Look to Jesus (Heb. 12:1-3). Our Savior, Redeemer, and Friend wants you to be happy. He wants you to have a happy and vibrant relationship with your spouse. He wants you to be a "joint-heir of the grace of life" with your spouse, and for both of you to see good days (1 Pet. 3:7; 10). His experience in being the Bridegroom of the church makes him imminently qualified to give instruction regarding love, sacrifice, and the fostering and development of relationship building. His listening ear as our mediator and high priest means that he is sympathetic to our needs and struggles. He is the model for perfect human behavior and the exemplar of true genuine love.

2. Deny Yourself (Luke 9:23). To strengthen your marriage you must first and foremost surrender your will to Jesus and His word. You must truly empty yourself of a life ruled by the flesh and selfish desires. As Christians we are called to a life of service and self-sacrifice. The one who is raised with Christ through baptism (Col. 2:12; 3:1) is dead (3:2). His or her life is crucified along with the old man of sin, and a new and Christ centered life must become dominant. You must come to understand that your purpose in living is not to please yourself, but to please the One who died for you; the One who was the ultimate example of self-denial and selfless motives (cf. Rom 14:1-3). Living a life of self-denial will cause you to be more conscious of your responsibilities to please your neighbor, which of course most assuredly would include your spouse (Rom. 15:2). If, to the glory of Christ, husbands will deny themselves then wives will be cherished, nurtured and loved. If wives too would deny themselves then husbands will be loved, respected, and obeyed.

3. Arm yourself with the word of God (Eph. 6:10-17). Hiding God's word in your heart will enable you to make better decisions. It will act as umpire in your heart (Col. 3:15) deterring you from harsh and sinful behavior toward your spouse. The word of God will make you wise unto salvation and provide you with the answers and tools you need for successful relationship building and strengthening. The power of the gospel message

and its truths relating to ethical behavior will transform and strengthen even the worst of marriages, and take the best of marriages to the zenith of marital joy.

4. Attend a marriage seminar (Prov. 19:20). Listening to the wisdom and experience of others is crucial. Receiving instruction from aged men and aged women is biblical and should be whole-heartedly embraced (Titus 2:1-3). Consider Proverbs 12:15, “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel.” It’s hard for me to understand why any Christian couple would refuse to attend a series of lessons that are designed to strengthen their marriage. Marriage seminars I have attended have been Bible based, Christ centered, and God honoring. To hear God’s word proclaimed and applied to the subject of marriage is edifying and fortifying. Every seminar I have attended has had at least one couple who at first reluctantly attended, only to lament afterwards about having waited so long, and then vowing to attend another at their next opportunity.

5. Start talking (Prov. 25:11-13). Communication is to a relationship what blood is to life. If, as husband and wife, you are to reach the goal of truly being one; and are determined to be compassionate and understanding of one another; and you are seeking to truly know and appreciate one another; and you are committed to bearing one another’s burdens; and you are genuinely interested in cherishing and loving each other with an unselfish love; then you must work on improving your communication patterns. Without prayer your personal relationship with God will die. Similarly, without communication in your marriage your relationship will die.

6. Turn your anger into love (Matt. 5:44). Unresolved anger will only damage you and other relationships that are important to you. Few are the times when anger is manifested in a helpful way. When anger is bitter, punitive, hostile, ferocious, indignant, antagonistic, belligerent, demeaning, castigating, vilifying, damaging, degrading, or physical, it will only cause further harm and serve to reinforce whatever negative attitudes your spouse or others may already have of you. Anger is a communication killer, and an obstacle to conflict resolution. Be angry, but do not sin in your anger (Eph. 4:26). Consider also the many passages which direct us to be “slow to anger,” and to be careful about associating with those who are known for their anger and hostility (Prov. 22:24, 25; 15:18;

20:2; 29:11; 14:29). Instead, strengthen your marriage by exhibiting true biblical love, a love that seeks what is best regardless of how it affects the one who gives it. This is the same kind of love manifested by God when He sent His son to die for the world. God did what was best no matter the cost. Loving the unlovable—this is what changed the world and this is what will forever change and strengthen your marital relationship.

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Testament in America (and elsewhere) are insightfully and helpfully discussed. An encyclopedic resource!

The Book of Acts, by Wayne Jackson. For well over fifty years now, brother Jackson has authored books and articles on an amazing variety of biblical themes. His commentary on Acts is indicative of his life’s work - scholarly, thoughtful, concise, and well balanced. No matter what one’s maturity level, this book is well worth consulting.

Voyage of Faith, by Frank Chesser. Written by a wonderful preacher of the gospel, this book on the subject of Bible baptism is well worth reading. It can be given to those contemplating baptism or to those who have recently been baptized, and it will offer much encouragement and instruction. But it also is helpful even for those who have been Christians for years and/or for use in Bible classes.

Bible Treasures, by Johnny Ramsey. Written by a veritable “walking Bible,” this book is a real gem. It contains everything from a commentary on Revelation to discussions of various denominational doctrines like pentecostalism and dispensationalism. Brother Ramsey was a master preacher and a great Bible student. He had a remarkable gift for being say things clearly and in a memorable way. A Christian will find a lot of wisdom and help in consulting this book.

Maximizing spiritual growth involves a number of factors. Yet no one would doubt that one of those factors would have to be intake of God’s truth. The books mentioned in this brief article will help your soul feast upon God’s truth.

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