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KEY TWO: MIGHTY IN THE SCRIPTURES

*Can God use me if I don't know
the Bible that well?*

Ninety-nine Christians in every hundred are merely playing at Bible study, and therefore ninety-nine Christians in every hundred are mere weaklings when they might be giants, both in their Christian life and in their service. —R.A. Torrey (1856-1928)¹

Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. (Acts 18:24)

THE “HAVES” AND THE “HAVE-NOTS”

Having disciplined people for over 30 years, I have found that in God's kingdom, there is one thing that separates the “haves” from the “have-nots,” the mighty from the weak. Those Christians who never seem to get off the ground spiritually, and those who take off quickly only to plummet

¹ R.A. Torrey, *Why God Used D.L. Moody* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1923), 19-20.

back to earth, typically have this in common—they never take time to really get to know the Bible. They may listen to Christian music, read the latest Christian books, go to conferences, attend church, listen to podcasts, have moving spiritual experiences, even have a seminary degree ... but they just don't know THE BOOK. On the other hand, those Christians who take off like rockets and blaze through life like fiery comets share this trait—after becoming Christians, they spend countless hours in the Bible, marinating their minds in it, memorizing it, and meditating on it ... like my good friend Brandon.²

BRANDON'S METAMORPHOSIS

One of these days some simple soul will pick up the Book of God, read it, and believe it. Then the rest of us will be embarrassed. —Leonard Ravenhill (1907-1994)³

The wickedness in Brandon's family tree went as far back as he knew. Crime and immorality were the norm. His great-grandmother was a prostitute who used to “turn tricks” while her kids waited in the car. His grandmother was a stripper who married over a half dozen men. When Brandon was 18, some middle-aged guy claiming to be his dad showed up, but Brandon couldn't be sure. The mystery man was gone as quickly as he appeared.

² Since this book was first published, Brandon became a founding member and deacon of The Refuge Fellowship Church. He married Sophia (see her amazing story in Chapter 6), and they recently celebrated the birth of their first son. Brandon is now a successful business owner and employs many of the young men in our discipleship program. (See his testimony at <https://youtu.be/LYEf7l6-5M>.)

³ Leonard Ravenhill, *Why Revival Tarries* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1959), 61.

It probably won't surprise anyone to learn that Brandon spent his teenage years bouncing around the foster care system, moving from town to town, going from one school to another. It also won't surprise anyone to learn that he had a habit of getting into trouble with the law. I met him right around the time he was kicked out of our local high school; he got bored one night and decided to break in and vandalize it. The administration told him he would never be welcome back at that school again—ever! So you may wonder how it happened that Brandon not only received his diploma from that school but of all the students in his graduating class, he was chosen to give the baccalaureate address.

The only way to describe what happened to him is the word *metamorphosis*. His change was so radical that a school employee walked up to him one day and just broke down in tears. *What happened to you?* she asked. Brandon was always more than happy to tell anyone who wanted to know. *I gave my life to Jesus*, he would say. But you need to know that this was not all he did. He also took the next logical step, which separates him from thousands of other young people who have tried the whole “Jesus thing” and failed. Brandon made a deep commitment to know and obey the Word of God.

I had the privilege of discipling Brandon in those early years, with a front row seat to the jaw-dropping renovation of his broken life. Back in those days, there were many mornings I would pop out of bed at 4 a.m. and race over to the church. I knew Brandon would already be there, praying and studying God's Word. He was allowing God to ransack and renovate his fallen mind. He was in the habit of committing whole books of the Bible to memory—first James, then Galatians, then Romans. I honestly believe that

he had more Scripture memorized after just one year than most pastors do in a lifetime.

What's the takeaway here? Being saved, or born again, can happen as quick as lightning, but real-life change happens through that long, hard process called renewing the mind—a.k.a. discipleship. *Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:2)*. The fact is that even after our souls are saved, our minds are still a mess. Why? Because we don't get a brain transplant at salvation. If we really want to change, we have to know that BOOK. Without this, we may be saved, but (ironic as this sounds) still crazy. This applies to people from wild, sinful backgrounds like Brandon, but it also applies to people from nice religious backgrounds. (Jesus made it very clear that the “nice” folks are often the toughest nuts for God to crack.)

The great news is that everyone who is truly saved receives the Holy Spirit, so they now have the ability to understand the truths of the Bible—they have a new internal Teacher, Guide, and Interpreter (*1 Corinthians 2:16*). What they need to do next is adopt a new way of seeing the world. The Bible calls this *the mind of Christ*. But this new understanding is not automatic. The hard truth is that we need to relearn pretty much *everything*. Like Brandon, we absolutely must put in the time and effort. If we don't, we will remain spiritual babies, missing out on the riches of our inheritance in Christ, tragically ineffective in ministry.

WE ARE INSANE

Ever since the Garden of Eden, when we unplugged from God's light and life, humans have had a skewed vision of the universe. Sure, our minds can (more or less) grasp some of

the obvious, objective facts of the universe: $2 + 2 = 4$, water is made of hydrogen and oxygen, and dogs are way cooler than cats. But when it comes to discerning the bigger questions of life—priorities, meaning, value, morals, religion—our thinking is a hash, a twisted mess of truth and lies, sense and nonsense.

Their understanding is darkened, and they are separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. (Eph. 4:18)

Getting saved does not automatically fix our twisted thinking. We are still basically nuts—saved, but nuts. This means that a young Christian will often be just as wrong in their opinions as a lost person. Did you get that? *We can be saved yet have opinions that are actually opposed to the ways of God.* Getting saved initiates the process of transformation. Now we must renew our minds.

Every new Christian should have the following as their top priority. They should be on a single-minded quest to escape their sick, twisted, pre-Christian way of thinking and learn to see the world from God's perspective. How? By studying, memorizing, and meditating on God's Word—the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. This is essential for anyone who hopes to find real freedom and fruitfulness.

If you remain in my words, then you are really my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (John 8:31-32)

All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in right living; so that the godly person may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

The Bible says that we are saved so that we can become *disciples*, and the very word *disciple* (Gk. *mathētēs*) literally means *learner*. Jesus's program has always been about educating us, freeing us from the spell that sin and Satan had over our minds—getting us out of the spiritual nuthouse. On the day we get saved, we are admitted to school—God's school. He now needs to reteach us almost everything.

Someone might ask, *Is it really all that bad? Are our minds really that twisted?* The fact is that God's way of seeing things would never even cross the radar screen of our minds if God didn't help us. Listen to what He says about the matter in the book of Isaiah:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways, says the LORD. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (55:8-9)

Thankfully, God has taken the initiative to bridge that massive gap between His mind and ours. The same chapter in Isaiah tells us that He bridges this gap by sending His Word to us:

For just as the rain and snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout, and providing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so is My word which goes forth from My mouth. (55:10-11)

The new heavenly perspective we so desperately need does not come through mystical intuition, and it doesn't come through some instantaneous zap when someone lays hands on and prays over us. We lay hold of this new perspective, literally the mind of Christ, as the Holy Spirit teaches us via the Word of God, the Bible. Don't be

deceived. Born-again Christians can be just as broken, crazy, emotionally unstable, bound up, and miserable as any lost person out there. Check out *1 Corinthians* sometime—those were some crazy Christians. They were saved, but crazy ... just like all of us before we renew our minds.

Yes, the Bible says that every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places is ours in Christ Jesus (*Ephesians 1:3*). Yes, God desires that we all experience deep intimacy with Him and have victory over sin and Satan. Yes, God wants us all to walk in peace, power, joy, and wisdom. But all these things don't happen instantaneously on the day we get saved. All these blessings only become ours as we prayerfully, humbly search God's Word every day and let it reform the deep structures of our minds.

Reading Christian books and listening to Christian podcasts simply will not get the job of transformation done. Having a spine-tingling spiritual experience won't fix us either. Even earning a seminary degree, and then going into full-time ministry, will not substitute for knowing God's Word deeply. As wonderful as all these things may be, they can only serve as supplements. We become strong and mature only when the Word of God gets into us and changes us.

Like newborn babies, long for pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow in respect to your salvation.
(*1 Peter 2:2*)

There are no shortcuts, and there are no cheats. The Christian who naïvely (or stubbornly) refuses to embrace God's process of renewing their mind will live out their days on earth like some billionaire child of a king who sleeps on the street and eats out of trash cans. This is precisely why so

many Christians feel like Christianity just doesn't work—they wanted a magic zap, not the arduous process of renewing their mind. At salvation, God gives us His Holy Spirit so we can understand His Word, and then He leads us into the written text so we can lay hold of the riches of our inheritance. This is the only way our lives will change—as we allow the Spirit to lead us in God's truth.

Things which no eye has seen and no ear has heard and which have never even entered into the heart of man, all the things that God has prepared for those who love Him. But to us He has revealed them through His Spirit. (1 Corinthians 2:9)

SO GROW UP!

As a result, we should no longer be children, tossed around by waves and carried all over by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by shrewdness in devious scheming; but lovingly speaking truth, we should grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head—Christ. (Ephesians 4:14-15)

According to the Bible, a Christian who has not done their time in the Word is *de facto* a spiritual “baby.” Spiritual babies are often full of naïve self-confidence, but they are of little use to God's kingdom and cause. They can't do much. They may have burning hearts to save the world, but the problem is they are still largely *un-Christian* in their thought processes.

Paul pulls no punches when rebuking such stunted Christians. They are pretty easy to spot—they believe themselves to be capable and wise but often don't play well with others (they are often ministry critics and ministry splitters).

I gave you milk and not solid food, for you were not yet able to receive it. The fact is that even now, you are still not able. For you are still living by the flesh. Since there is jealousy and fighting among you, are you not still fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? (1 Corinthians 3:1-3)

The author of Hebrews rebukes his readers for having the same problem. He could tell they were spiritual babies because he needed to keep reviewing the basics of the faith with them. They had more than enough time to mature in the Word, but they were still in spiritual diapers. Very specifically, they are rebuked because they are unclear about an Old Testament figure by the name of Melchizedek. (*How many Christians today know anything about Melchizedek?*)

By this time, you should be teachers, but you still need someone to teach you the most basic principles of the words of God. (Hebrews 5:12)

Now there is nothing wrong with starting out as a baby—we all do—but we must grow up, and the only way to do this is to deeply know the Word of God.

Here is the cold, hard truth—if anyone thinks they are ready for ministry (to disciple someone, be a ministry leader, a teacher, or a missionary) before they can quote hundreds and hundreds of Scriptures by heart, they are deceived. The reality is that they are still just a baby, a deceived baby.

If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. (Galatians 6:3)

Let's get practical here. A reasonable starting point for any serious new believer would be at least an hour a day in the Bible. Considering our extreme condition—insanity—

this is really a pretty minimal commitment, but it will get you started. I always recommend to new disciples that much of this daily hour be spent memorizing. (*One of the first things I encourage a new believer to do is memorize the entire book of James, all five chapters.*)

Is what I am suggesting here some radical new approach to Christianity? No, it is the clear message and method taught by both Scripture and history. It is really the only way that works and the only way that God honors. As we will see below, the first disciples were absolutely filled with Scripture ... even before Jesus called them. We will also see that the most powerful, effective servants of God in church history—the George Müllers, D.L. Moodys, John Wesleys, etc. — knew the Bible like they knew their own names. It's the old school way and one of the primary reasons that the old schoolers were so much more effective than we are today.

If God is to come in power again to transform the barren wastelands of our earth into a beautiful, lush garden, it will only happen as someone (anyone) makes a renewed commitment to really know and follow His Word. *Someone like you.*

THE BIBLICAL MODEL

A dangerous teaching is being passed around the church these days, misleading scores of zealous young believers. The main point of this misguided Bible study goes something like this—*You may be a young Christian, but God can use you RIGHT NOW to do amazing things. So get out there and lead a Bible study, become a small group leader, disciple someone, or get out on the mission field. NOW!* The Scripture below is often (mis)used as a springboard:

Let no one look down on the fact that you are young, but in speech, behavior, love, faith, and purity, prove yourself to be an example to those who believe. (1 Timothy 4:12)

This verse, taken from Paul's first letter to his young protégé Timothy, is wrongly interpreted to insist that even a very new Christian can immediately jump right in and effectively minister almost anywhere. But the truth proven by Scripture, history, and experience is that apart from hours and hours (days, weeks, and years) of submitting to the process of developing *the mind of Christ*, we won't be able to do much for God.

The first thing new believers need to do is take adequate time to prepare themselves and get their own heads on straight. They need to get to know the Bible deeply—memorize a few small epistles for starters, learn about all the important figures and events, and then spend time figuring out how the spiritual principles laid out in the Bible actually work. This is stage one for everyone who wants to have a lifetime of useful service for God. There is no other way. Again, there are no cheat codes, no shortcuts.

Let's put on our thinking caps, and briefly look at *1 Timothy 4:12*—*let no one look down on the fact that you are young*. What is this verse really saying? What do we know about young Timothy? In the first place, we know that he was not an inexperienced new believer. He was probably pushing 40 years old at this point. It's also helpful to know that prior to receiving this letter, Timothy had traveled with the apostle Paul for almost a decade and a half; that's enough time to earn a BA, an MA, and a PhD ... under the personal tutelage of one of the greatest Christians who ever lived.

But Timothy's season of being mentored by Paul is really only half of his impressive résumé. He had a profound

knowledge of Scripture before Paul ever met him. How do we know this? The Bible tells us that he was raised by a pious first-century Jewish mother. We will talk a little more about what such an upbringing looked like in a moment. Suffice it to say, on the day Paul chose him (see *Acts 16*), he knew the Scriptures better than you or I ever will. He probably had most of the Old Testament memorized. Paul himself says to Timothy, *From infancy, you have known the sacred scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15).*

All the evidence says that: 1. Timothy knew the Old Testament Scriptures like the back of his hand on the day Paul recruited him, and 2. He then spent around 15 years learning from the man who wrote 13 of our 27 New Testament books. Any Bible study honoring what *1 Timothy 4:12* is really saying would conclude something like this: *A person who knows the Scriptures deeply and then goes through years of adequate preparation, discipleship, and mentoring is ready for ministry ... even if they are still relatively young.* To apply this verse to a new believer who has almost no biblical knowledge and no ministry experience is not only misleading, it is dangerous. (*I can tell you horror stories, seriously.*)

But we humans are stubborn in our errors, and we are particularly devoted to the romantic notion that any Christian with a burning heart can do virtually anything. We even have little jingles, like advertisements, to promote it—*God doesn't need your ability; He needs your availability.* We rip all sorts of Scriptures out of their literary context to support this misguided assertion. One favorite is *Philippians 4:13*—*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.* This is mistakenly used to insist that Jesus is the magic that will enable a person with no knowledge or experience to change

the world. (If you read *Philippians 4:13* in context, you will find that it actually has more to do with God sustaining a seasoned saint who is sitting on death row ... but I digress.)

Does this mean a person needs to lock themselves away in an ivory tower for 10 years before they can do any sort of ministry? Absolutely not. We should all be sharing our faith immediately, and with just a little learning, we can be effective at evangelism pretty quickly. We should also be trying out our wings in different ministries to see what unique spiritual gifts we might have. But like the original disciples and Timothy, there needs to be a serious, prolonged time of learning and being trained. For Timothy, this was the years spent with Paul. This time of being mentored is something that is almost completely missing from the church today. Even more importantly, so is the strong foundation of biblical knowledge that all the earliest disciples possessed. Let's look at some more biblical evidence.

JESUS

Jesus is not only our Savior, He is also our paradigm, our model of what a life pleasing to God looks like. One thing is abundantly clear—He had a deep, deep knowledge of Scripture. He was so well schooled in the Scriptures that even as a child, He amazed the great religious leaders in Jerusalem (*Luke 2:47*). We see how powerfully He wields the Scripture in His debates with the religious opposition until they just give up (*Matthew 22:46*). How effortlessly He cuts the devil down with Scripture, saying, *It is written* (*Matthew 4:1-11*). How did He become so well versed in the biblical text? Hard work.

Many people are under the delusion that Jesus had some sort of “easy button” that He could push whenever things got

rough, that He could just fall back on His powers as infinite God to get Him through the tough times. On the contrary, all the biblical evidence indicates that Jesus had to grit it out just like we do. He set aside all His powers and prerogatives as God when He became the God-Man (*Philippians 2:6-7*). This means that Jesus had to put in countless hours of memorization and study just like all the rest of us. Even though this is true, it's easy for us to say, *No one can be just like Jesus, so I am off the hook*. Okay, then let's move on from Him and look at some mere mortals who were a lot more like us—His first disciples. How well did they know the Scriptures?

THE FIRST DISCIPLES

People who don't understand first-century Judaism might say, *Jesus's disciples were just good old blue-collar boys, so they probably didn't know Scripture that well*. How abysmally wrong that thought is. The fact is that on the very first day that Jesus called His disciples, they all probably knew the Scriptures better than any pastor you will ever meet (yes, I said *on the day Jesus called them*). The average pious first-century Jew in Israel ate, slept, and breathed Scripture from the day they were born. Their entire world was saturated, shaped, and instructed by it. The first-century historian Josephus (37-100 A.D.) tells us how well versed in it the average "Jew on the street" was in Jesus's day:

If anybody but asks any one of them about our laws (The Scripture), he will more readily tell them all than he will tell his own name, and this in consequence of our having learned them immediately as soon as ever we became

*sensible of anything, and of our having them as it were engraved on our souls.*⁴

The fact is that the first disciples—Peter, Andrew, James, John, etc.—took in the Old Testament writings with their mother’s milk. As good Jewish boys, their earliest education at home centered around the Scripture, and then at about six years of age, they were sent off to the local synagogue to begin formal instruction. Here they were grilled over the first five books of Scripture, called *The Torah* or *The Pentateuch*. It was not uncommon for young boys to memorize them in their entirety—that means *Genesis through Deuteronomy permanently tattooed on their little brains*. Most of them would also apprentice in a trade, like fishing or carpentry, but they did this in conjunction with years of diligent Scripture study.

In addition to their rigorous life of study, memorizing huge tracks of the Old Testament, we can’t overlook the fact that the disciples later went to “Jesus University.” They spent over three years full-time sitting at Jesus’s feet, learning and being coached by the Master Himself. If you do the math, this amounts to well over 10,000 hours of additional learning and field practice. Jesus would often challenge and critique them during this time to make sure they were getting things right.

(I like to ask young people who want to go into ministry, *Have you done your 10,000 hours yet?* But, the comparison really breaks down because the disciples’ 10,000 hours were done on top of their earlier training. Remember that on day one, they already knew the Old Testament better than you or I ever will.)

⁴ Josephus, *Against Apion*, 2, 19.

What about the latecomer, the apostle Paul, who wrote 13 of our New Testament books (*Romans* through *Philemon*)? What kind of preparation did he go through? Well, as a little boy he went to the synagogue school, and all evidence is that he was recognized as having unique intellectual abilities. He was put on the “gifted track.” The book of *Acts* tells us that he was sent to study under one of the greatest teachers of his day, a rabbi by the name of Gamaliel (*Acts* 22:3). To make a long story short, this means that when Jesus called him, Paul knew the Scriptures even better than Peter, Andrew, John, and the boys. He probably had the biblical text memorized in multiple languages, not to mention the fact that he would have been up on all the relevant theological, philosophical, and historical discussions of his day. (Oh yeah, we can’t forget that he still spent an additional 10 years or so preparing *after* Jesus called him—read *Galatians* 1). Conclusion: The first disciples *really* knew the Scriptures. Do we?

GO AND MAKE DUMBED-DOWN DISCIPLES ...

Here is a question that every serious Christian needs to chew on: Before Jesus went back to His Father, did He tell the disciples to perpetuate some dumbled-down version of Christianity? Did Jesus say, *Just have them memorize John 3:16 and encourage them to have a 10-minute quiet time every day?* What Jesus actually said was that He wanted them to reproduce themselves, to make followers who knew everything they knew. *Teach them to observe everything I commanded you (Matthew 28:20)*. Let’s state the obvious—this would mean a deep knowledge of the Scriptures as a foundation and then several years of instruction and guidance.

Paul gives the same sort of instructions to Timothy. *Reproduce what you are, Timothy, generation after generation after generation.*

The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (2 Timothy 2:2)

The obvious conclusion? We have some catching up to do. We are called to be little copies of the original disciples. Again, they had vast portions of the Scriptures committed to memory on day one, and they spent over 10,000 hours sitting at Jesus's feet being coached in life and ministry. The stark reality is that the contemporary Christian church is lightyears from Jesus's original vision. Could this be why we have lost sight of so many of the things they knew and cannot do the things they did? The contrast between their notion of discipleship and the contemporary church seems (to borrow a biblical phrase) *as high as the heavens are above the earth*. But things have not always been this way in God's church. When God's people have recaptured His vision of discipleship and a passion for the Scriptures, God's power has been unleashed on earth.

FOLLOWING THE HISTORICAL MODEL

If you look to the lives of God's best and brightest down through the ages, they clearly have some things in common. One common denominator is that they had a jaw-dropping commitment to the Word of God. There are quite literally thousands of amazing men and women I could point to here. Below is a quick sampling from the lives of some of my favorite Christians of all time.

GEORGE MÜLLER (1805-1898)

Anyone who doubts that the God of Elijah is still alive and well needs to read Müller's biography.⁵ What was his secret? It is a well-known fact that this amazing man of faith read his Bible from beginning to end almost 200 times over the course of his life and had much of it committed to memory. The accounts of his life are almost too much to process. He led multitudes into the kingdom and is best known for raising thousands of orphans without ever asking for a dime. He simply prayed in faith and expected God to do miracles. Below is a life-altering discovery that Müller made as a young, immature Christian. We would be wise to pay attention to his words.

I fell into the snare, into which many young believers fall, the reading of religious books in preference to the Scriptures. ... I read tracts, missionary newsletters, sermons, and biographies of Christian people. ... Like many believers, I practically preferred, for the first four years of my divine life, to read the works of uninspired men rather than the oracles of the living God. The consequence was that I remained a babe, both in knowledge and grace.⁶

Once his eyes were opened, although he was a scholar with a working knowledge of 10 languages, until the day of

⁵ For an introduction to Müller's life, see A.T. Pierson, *George Müller of Bristol and his Witness to a Prayer-Hearing God* (New York: The Baker and Taylor Co., 1899). For a less comprehensive autobiography, see George Müller, *The Life of Trust: Being a Narrative of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1861).

⁶ *Answers to Prayer from George Müller's Narratives*, compiled by A.E.C. Brooks (Chicago: Moody Press, 1895), 56.

his death Müller preferred to simply abide in the words of Scripture.

I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the word of God and to meditation on it. ... What is the food of the inner man? Not prayer, but the word of God; and ... not the simple reading of the word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water runs through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it, and applying it to our hearts.⁷

D.L. MOODY (1837-1899)⁸

It is estimated that this one-man phenomenon led one million people to Christ over the course of his life. He never received a formal education in the great universities of America or Europe, but he had a deep knowledge of the Bible. In a sermon preached after his death, his dear friend R.A. Torrey revealed one of the secrets of his effectiveness:

(H)e was a student, a profound and practical student of the one Book that is more worth studying than all other books in the world put together; he was a student of the Bible. Every day of his life, I have reason for believing, he arose very early in the morning to study the Word of God, way down to the close of his life. Mr. Moody used to rise about four o'clock in the morning to study the Bible. He would say to me: "If I am going to get in any study, I have got to get up before the other folks get up," and he would

⁷ George Müller, *George Müller, The Life of Trust* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln), 209.

⁸ For an introduction to Moody's life, see William R. Moody, *The Life of D.L. Moody* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1900).

shut himself up in a remote room in his house, alone with his God and his Bible.⁹

Moody himself regularly made comments like the following:

I never saw a fruit-bearing Christian who was not a student of the Bible. If a man neglects his Bible, he may pray and ask God to use him in His work; but God cannot make use of him, for there is not much for the Holy Ghost to work upon. We must have the Word itself, which is sharper than any two-edged sword.¹⁰

R.A. TORREY (1856-1928)

Torrey was Moody's protégé and successor at the Moody Bible Institute, author of dozens of spiritual classics, and one of the most influential Christians of his day. Here is his opinion on the matter:

The great reservoir of the power that belongs to God is His own Word—the Bible. If we wish to make it ours, we must go to that Book. Yet people abound in the church who are praying for power and neglecting the Bible. ... If we are to obtain fullness of power in life and service, we must feed upon the Word of God. ... If we will not take time to study the Bible, we cannot have power any more than we can have physical power if we will not take time to eat nutritious food.¹¹

⁹ *Why God Used D.L. Moody*, 17.

¹⁰ D.L. Moody, *Pleasure and Profit in Bible Study* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1895), 8.

¹¹ R.A. Torrey, *How to Obtain Fullness of Power* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1897), 7.

The irrefutable fact is this—those whom God uses greatly have a deep and profound knowledge of the Bible. John Wesley (1703- 1791), God’s great firebrand in The First Great Awakening, said, *O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be “homo unius libri” (a man of one book).*¹² It was said of John Bunyan (1628-1688), the author of one of the most influential Christian books ever written (*Pilgrim’s Progress*¹³), that he was so filled with Scripture that if you pricked him with a pin, he would bleed lines from the Bible. Francis Asbury (1745-1816), arguably the most important figure in the Christianizing of post-Revolutionary War America, said this, *I find ... it of more consequence to a preacher to know his Bible than all the languages or books in the world.*¹⁴ Consider the Methodist Circuit Riders, responsible for Christianizing the wild American frontiers. They were expected to spend six hours a day in the study of the Bible and related books.

The testimony is the same when we jump across the oceans, cultures, and generations. John Sung (1901-1944),¹⁵ one of the most influential men in the history of the Chinese church, called “John the Baptist of China,” read through the Bible 40 times in only seven months before he exploded onto

¹² This quote is found in the preface of Wesley’s collected sermons. See, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 5.

¹³ One of the bestselling Christian books of all time, this classic was written in 1678, and originally titled, *The Pilgrim’s Progress from This World, to That Which Is to Come*.

¹⁴ *The Journal of Francis Asbury*, July 23, 1779.

¹⁵ See, *The Diary of John Sung: Extracts from His Journal and Notes* (Singapore: Armour Publishing, 2011).

the scene. A more recent example of a mighty man of God in China is Brother Yun (b. 1958).¹⁶ After his conversion, Yun was in the habit of committing whole books of the Bible to memory. His very first sermon was reciting the entire *Gospel of Matthew* verse by verse. If I brought out all the historical data here, this chapter could go on for hundreds of pages. The bottom line is this—to be mature in Christ and mighty in ministry, you must know the Bible deeply. The Bible teaches this. History teaches this. There is simply no other way.

*Oh, you may talk about power; but, if you neglect the one Book that God has given you as the one instrument through which He imparts and exercises His power, you will not have it. You may read many books and go to many conventions, and you may have your all-night prayer meetings to pray for the power of the Holy Ghost; but unless you keep in constant and close association with the one Book, the Bible, you will not have power. And if you ever had power, you will not maintain it except by the daily, earnest, intense study of that Book.*¹⁷

THE HARD TRUTH

According to the Bible, we all begin our Christian lives as fools. Our first objective as Christians should be to take adequate time to get our personal/spiritual/psychological house in order. Only then will we be able to help others. Think about it. Prior to meeting Jesus, you and I spent years and years programming our minds for sin and death with pop

¹⁶ Paul Hattaway and Brother Yun, *The Heavenly Man: The Remarkable True Story of Chinese Christian Brother Yun* (Grand Rapids: Monarch Books, 2002).

¹⁷ *Why God Used D.L. Moody*, 19.

culture, movies, gossip, talk shows, crazy professors, and bad religion. This rotten thinking has to be cleaned out and replaced with the mind of Christ. *Erase and Replace!*

Don't let anyone deceive himself; if anyone of you thinks he is wise in this age, he must become foolish so that he can become wise. For this world's wisdom is foolishness to God. (1 Corinthians 3:18-19)

Like Brandon, we need to allow God to demolish what we think and rebuild our minds. If Christians won't allow God to do this, they will remain blind fools ... ironically, saved blind fools (and their lives of frustration will bear this out).

In biblical times, they used to lay hands on people when they were sending them into ministry. Paul warned, *Don't lay hands on anyone too quickly (1 Timothy 5:22)*. Why? Because they don't really have any idea what they are doing and they will inevitably get themselves and others into trouble. A young believer isn't even close to being ready to fulfill Christ's mandate—*Go into all the world and make disciples*. To do that, a person needs to be familiar with all the subjects in this book—they need to know how to walk in victory over sin, how to move God's hand with their prayers, they need to understand spiritual warfare, how to cooperate with the Holy Spirit, etc. Please hear me, next generation—a young believer who does not know the Bible can't do any of this yet.

We should all be telling people about Jesus the very day we get saved, but New Testament ministry is not just about sharing the gospel. Jesus's Great Commission was not just, *Get people saved*—it was, *Make disciples*. This is a task that takes some real expertise. Making disciples means that in

addition to *getting them saved*, we need to teach them absolutely everything that Jesus and the apostles said about everything—money, marriage, sex, prayer, psychological disorders, suffering, bitterness, spiritual power, Satan, etc.

*Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations ...
teaching them to observe everything I commanded you.
(Matthew 28:19-20)*

The core problem with so much Christian ministry these days is this: The people who are trying to do ministry never went through the New Testament process of becoming disciples themselves. The sad fact is that their attempts to help others are, for the most part, *all zeal, no knowledge*; they don't have biblical wisdom to give away. But seriously, isn't this all just common sense? If I haven't learned (from the Bible) how to unravel the knots in my own head, I can't help anyone else unravel theirs. If I don't know how to overcome sin, I can't help you overcome sin. If I don't know how to pray effectively, or anything about the Holy Spirit, how can I help you?

What so many of us in the church really need to do is to back way, way up. We need to stop telling new believers to charge out and “save the world” and first teach them how to do it. Ministry is a skill set, and very few people are experiencing success because they haven't taken the time to learn. So let's pull back and refocus on Jesus's original mission for His followers—*learn everything He had to say about everything*, or as the apostle put it, *Be transformed through the renewing of the mind (Romans 12:2)*. The fact is that all of us come into God's kingdom insane, and it takes serious time to straighten out our own minds.

MY PLEA

I am appealing to the generation behind mine—PLEASE BECOME MIGHTY IN THE WORD. I hate to say this, but my generation has largely blown it. This fact has been proven by scientific research—American Christians remain “fond of” the Bible, but they don’t actually read it.¹⁸ The average pew warmer of my generation can quote their favorite movies, sing you whole albums of secular music, and give you their favorite sitcom episodes line-by-line. Still, very few can say (like Jesus did), *It is written*. There are exceptions, of course, but for all our talk about being “Bible-based” and “Bible-believing,” I doubt one Christian in a hundred over 30 years of age can even tell you the books of the Bible in order.

Please, next generation, don’t follow our lead. For the last 100 years, much of the evangelical church was like a big spiritual nursery school just waiting for the next Pied Piper, the next quick fix, the next shortcut. Please do what the powerhouses in Scripture and history did. Memorize that book, meditate on it, and marinate your brains in it until you have the mind of Christ. Develop the ability to discern for yourself. Don’t trust anyone until they pass the Berean test—*they searched the Scriptures daily to see if these things were true (Acts 17:11)*. Don’t be afraid to scrutinize your own church, your pastor, and all the authors, experts, and media personalities out there who claim to represent God.

You have a huge job in front of you—reprogramming your entire operating system, dismantling and reassembling your worldview—and that takes blood, sweat, and tears

¹⁸ See Bob Smietana, “LifeWay Research: Americans Are Fond of the Bible, Don’t Actually Read It” (LifeWay Research, April 25, 2017).

(hours, days, weeks, years). This is the only way to spiritual maturity and the only way our world will ever be transformed. Become mighty in the Word. Then *you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:32)*.

Postscript: The Great Twentieth-Century Spiritual Cheat

Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize ... taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God. (Colossians 2:18-19)

Before moving on, there is one more issue I need to address very quickly. In the twentieth century, a massive lie was propagated in certain sectors of God's church (and it now continues into the twenty-first century). This lie is that the real, biblically recommended process of Christian maturity can be avoided. *We don't need to have a profound knowledge of the Bible, we are told. We don't have to spend 10,000 hours at the feet of the Master like the first disciples did, many say. God has provided His children with a shortcut, a cheat—a fast track to maturity and usefulness.*

What is this supposed "cheat" that can save us from years of hard study and discipline, prayer, and practice? *Having a direct line to Jesus without ever really knowing the Bible.* The argument typically goes something like this: *Studying the Bible is for unspiritual, dry, bookish types, but for the truly spiritual, God will talk directly to you, and you don't really need the Bible.* I recall hearing of one misguided youth

leader under this delusion tearing pages out of his Bible, saying, *We don't need the Bible if we have Jesus*. Recently, another teacher was defending her very strange views by claiming she had a “revelatory gift.” She said she was not “bound” to the biblical text because she had a “special” relationship with Jesus—He directly revealed secrets to her.

Sadly, this delusion seems pandemic right now. Spiritual babies by the thousands flock to churches, conferences, and so-called revivals because they want to go deep with God, but they don't want to put in the long hours necessary. They rely on mystical intuitions, dreams, visions, prophetic words, and spiritual experiences. The harm this hyper-spiritual delusion has brought to young Christians is impossible to calculate, but I pray to God the massive trend does not lay hold of the next generation the way it laid hold of many people in mine. Once again, there is no shortcut to the Promised Land; there are no cheat codes. Follow the lie, and the one who gets cheated will be you.

As an aside, am I against God speaking directly to us via dreams, visions, prophetic words, etc.? Absolutely not! My view is that if it is in the Bible, it's fair game for us today. *Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams (Acts 2:17)*. Most of the great moves of God and the great saints down through the ages experienced some pretty wild and amazing stuff. But the big difference between the old schoolers and today's spiritual cheaters is that the old schoolers knew the Word deeply. Today's spiritual cheaters, as a rule, do not.

Those who open themselves up to things like mystical impressions, dreams, visions, and prophecies before they have a deep rooting and grounding in the Word of God are headed for trouble. They simply don't have the tools

necessary to determine the source of their dreams, visions, impressions, etc.—are they from heaven or hell?

At the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus showed us how to do it—check all spiritual promptings with the Word of God (*Matthew 4:1-11*). Anyone who doesn't know the Bible deeply simply cannot do this. Satan and his hordes are just licking their chops, waiting for the next hyper-spiritual baby Christian who believes they can attain maturity apart from a deep knowledge of the Bible. But the hosts of hell tremble at the thought of those who, like Jesus, can cut them down with, "*It is written ...*"