

# 3

## 3: THE BIBLE – THE WORD OF GOD

### *The need of the hour: to hear God speak*

The purpose of this chapter is to show the awful effect of neglecting the Bible and the consequences for the coming generation; and to show the amazing power of the Bible to transform our lives and our Churches.

There has been a great decline in Bible preaching and Bible reading in some parts of the Christian Church today. Present attitudes and culture are the outcome of core beliefs in the population. These core beliefs underlie everything, from news reporting, to novel writing, to views of history and most importantly our view of God. It is useful to understand the change in thinking that has taken place over recent centuries. Here is a greatly simplified overview:

- ◆ **Scholasticism:** this is the foundation of philosophy pre-1600. The basic belief was that truth comes from God through revelation and that reason and faith are both important tools for understanding the world in which we live. The Bible was regarded as the great key to understanding the universe.
- ◆ **Rationalism** 1600–now: the foundation of modern thought. Truth comes through the power of reason alone. This is the foundation of modern science and has brought great advances to the human race. However, theologians increasingly applied reason to the Bible instead of faith. There was a denial of the supernatural and the miraculous. The result was liberal theology. Theologians began to discuss the merits of the Bible along with other literature.

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- ◆ **Relativism** 1960–now: truth comes through the exercise of will and choice, which results in a loss of absolutes - there is no right or wrong, no absolute divine revelation. Truth is arrived at through dialogue and discussion. No-one has ‘the truth’. Each person creates their own world, and goes to their own heaven when they die. Opinion polls are more important than the Bible as a means of arriving at truth.

The 20th/21st century has suffered a loss of direction - there is no compass. Christians have become open to new ideas which are held to be of equal value to the Bible, e.g. words from angels, dreams and visions. Christians no longer ask, “*Is it in the Bible?*” As in Jeremiah’s day, there is a tragic rise in false prophecies. Prophets are prophesying from their own imagination, not from the Lord. Prophets prophesy peace when there is no peace and ‘*heal the hurt of the people slightly*’ [Jeremiah 6:14].

To major on the false is itself a tragic deception and derailment of many ministers. We must focus on God and on His Word, not on what is wrong around us. Nevertheless, while we seek to avoid unnecessary divisions, we do need to give a clear lead to God’s people. Christians desperately need a compass, and that compass is the Bible.

### ***Why is the Bible so important?***

**Smith Wigglesworth** said: “*God’s Word is supernatural in origin, eternal in duration, inexpressible in valour, infinite in scope, regenerative in power, infallible in authority, universal in application, inspired in totality. Read it through; write it down; pray it in; work it out; pass it on. The Word of God changes a man until he becomes an epistle of God.*”

God has revealed Himself through the Bible [Luke 16:31]. If people will not hear the Scriptures then miracles will not help them. The Bible is God’s Word spoken to God’s servants, and is the key to all we know about God.

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*In 1750 Voltaire said: “In 100 years the only remaining Bibles will be found in museums!”*

*One hundred years later, the British and Foreign Bible Society of Great Britain was producing and exporting record numbers of Bibles. They bought a house in Paris as a centre for their French distribution and filled it from the attic to the cellar with Bibles. The house they bought had been the former home of Voltaire ....*

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**John Wesley** said: *"I want to know one thing – the way to heaven; how to land safely on that happy shore. God Himself has condescended to teach the way; for this very end He came from heaven. He has written it down in a book. O give me that Book! At any price give me the Book of God!"*

### **1. The Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit** [2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21]

Many have opposed the Bible by asserting that it is the work of human beings. However, there are 24,000 manuscripts which confirm that the Bible has come down through the generations with no changes. Among ancient documents there is none that comes anywhere near the massive weight of evidence for the accuracy of the Bible. Homer's Iliad is the nearest rival, and for that there are only 643 manuscripts, with major differences.

Here are a few quotes on the authority of the Bible:

**Thomas Arnold (English Historian):** *"I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence than the Resurrection of Jesus Christ."*

**Sir Frederick Kenyon, Director of the British Museum:** *"The last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us as they were written now has been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the New Testament may now be regarded as firmly established."*

**Dr. Simon Greenleaf of Harvard University** tried to refute the New Testament and the accounts of Jesus Christ. He became utterly convinced that they were true and accurate documents, and said: *"The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the best established events of history according to the laws of legal evidence administered in the courts of justice."*

**Werner von Braun, a top scientist working on the NASA space program,** said: *"I never really became a scientist till I came to know Jesus Christ as Saviour and God."*

### **2. The Bible is proved as supernatural by many prophecies**

*The Bible contains many prophecies that were spoken years before the events took place.* Here are some examples of prophecies fulfilled:

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- ◆ Psalm 22 describes the cross 1,000 years before the event, and hundreds of years before the Romans invented that cruel form of execution.
- ◆ Isaiah foresaw the virgin birth of Christ [Isaiah 7:13-14].
- ◆ Isaiah 53 describes the sufferings of Christ and their purpose, giving details about His execution as a common criminal, while being buried in a rich man's tomb. This chapter also explains that He died to take away our sin.
- ◆ Isaiah foresaw that Messiah would gather all nations together, both Jew and Gentile [Isaiah 42: 1-9].
- ◆ Daniel predicted that Messiah would be anointed 483 years after the command to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem [Daniel 9:24-27].
- ◆ Daniel also predicted that Messiah would die 3½ years later. The command was given in 457 BC, and this places the beginning of Christ's anointed ministry in 26 AD and His death in 29 AD, which, given the fact that our modern dating has been proved to be four years late, is perfectly accurate.
- ◆ Micah said that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem [Micah 5:2-5].
- ◆ Zechariah foresaw his betrayal for 30 pieces of silver [Zechariah 11:12-13].

These are only a fraction of the many prophecies regarding Messiah and they confirm the identity of Christ as God and Man.

### **3. The Bible is proved by archaeological evidence**

There are countless examples of Bible details that have been unknown in history but have then been proved true through subsequent discoveries. Here are a few examples:

- ◆ Babylon was completely covered by the sand, and all trace of it was lost. Liberal scholars suggested the Bible had invented Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon, but then in the 19<sup>th</sup> century explorers found the ruins of Babylon; and on every brick was stamped the name of Nebuchadnezzar.
- ◆ Luke 2:2 tells us that Quirinius was governor of Syria at the time of the birth of Christ. No evidence of this was found, so the Scrip-

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tures were taken to be in error. Then in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a stone was found with an inscription indicating that Quirinius had indeed been governor of Syria for a short three-month period exactly when the Bible said he had.

- ◆ For centuries the Hittite nation and culture were only attested to by the Bible and so sceptics regarded it as a myth. However, archaeological discoveries have now abounded regarding the historical accuracy of the Bible information.
- ◆ Sir William M. Ramsay (1851-1939) was born in the lap of luxury and was raised as a non-believer by his atheist parents. He graduated from Oxford University with a PhD and became a professor at Aberdeen University. Determined to undermine the historical accuracy of the Bible, he studied archaeology with the aim of disproving the biblical account, in particular the book of Acts. After 25 years of work, Ramsay was awestruck by the accuracy of the book of Acts. In his quest to refute the Bible, he discovered many facts which confirmed its accuracy. He had to concede that Luke's account was exact even in the smallest detail. Far from attacking the biblical account, Ramsay produced a book, *St. Paul, the Traveller and Roman Citizen*, which supported it. Eventually, William Ramsay shook the intellectual world by converting to Christianity. Ironically, this man who set out to refute the Bible, found himself accepting it as God's Word because of his explorations and discoveries. For his many books contributing to biblical knowledge, he was also knighted.
- ◆ Luke 3:1 records that Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene in about 27 AD. For years scholars used this 'factual error' to prove Luke was wrong because it was common knowledge that Lysanias was not a tetrarch, but the ruler of Chalcis about 50 years earlier than when Luke described. But an archaeological inscription was found that said Lysanias was the tetrarch in Abila near Damascus at the time that Luke said. It turned out that there had been two people named Lysanias, and Luke had accurately recorded the facts.

### **4. The Bible has the Power to Create** [Hebrews 11:3]

God's words are not merely ideas, as when people write what they think. God's words are both ideas and events. What God says, happens. When the leper said in Matthew 8: "*Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean*", he was recognising the Kingly authority of Jesus. Jesus replied: "*I am willing; be cleansed.*" This is the word of the King, and what He says happens.

When Jesus said He was going to cross the lake, it was certain to take place. When He said, "*It is finished*", the reign of sin and death ended

at His command. The Bible must be read with faith in its sovereign power to change the lives of those who believe it; to bring healing, deliverance, forgiveness and full salvation.

**5. The Bible is razor-sharp to give us clear understanding of ourselves and eternal things** [Hebrews 4:12]

We cannot understand ourselves by psychology. Self-analysis is not fruitful in spiritual life. It is the word of God that alone gives light to darkened souls. We need supernatural discernment and wisdom in order to understand ourselves. This wisdom comes from the word of God.

**6. The Bible is Perfect and Life-changing to the Reader** [Psalm 19:7]

The Bible has a perfection that baffles the mind of the sceptic. Rationalists will not accept the Bible as perfect since to do so would be to recognise its supernatural and miraculous quality. Numerous word studies have been made which show that there are patterns in the Bible text that are themselves an indication of an underlying perfection. Jesus also said that not one jot (the smallest Hebrew letter) or tittle (a minute ornament over a Hebrew letter) would pass from the Law till all is fulfilled. This refers to the literal inspiration of the Bible through the writers. Peter says this in his second letter, where he affirms that: *“prophesy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit”* [2 Peter 1:21].

This perfect quality of the Bible is not merely technical but also spiritual. Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16 that, *“all Scripture is given by inspiration of God”*. Therefore its words have remarkable power in them.

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*Billy Graham had a close friend named Charles Templeton, who doubted the truthfulness and authority of the Bible. He tried to influence Billy Graham to follow his doubting path. In 1949, just before his great crusade in Los Angeles, Billy Graham wrestled in his own soul over the inspiration of the Bible. He went for a walk in a pine forest, and spread his Bible out before him, and at last embraced the Scripture in total submission as the authoritative and infallible Word of God.*

*Billy Graham noticed that whenever he quoted the Bible in his evangelism, the words had a distinct power to convict and bring illumination to the hearers. From that moment on he made it a deliberate policy to quote the Bible as often as possible while preaching.*

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## **7. The Bible Produces Faith in the Reader** [Romans 10:17]

The Bible teaches that faith comes as we perceive and apply God's word to ourselves. Faith is therefore a product of the word working on the heart and producing living faith as opposed to merely intellectual assent.

## **8. The Bible Brings the Wisdom Needed to Find Salvation** [2 Timothy 3:15]

There is no other book that explains the origins of mankind. Clearly speculation can never penetrate to things that happened at the dawn of time. The Bible, on the other hand, reveals these things - including the origin of evil, the purpose of Creation and the character of God. The Bible alone explains the cross and its meaning and power to save sinners.

### *The spiritual art of reading the Bible*

#### **1. We Must Read the Bible with the Right Attitude**

The Bible must be read with the right attitude or it will not benefit the reader:

##### ❖ **We are to receive the Word of God as seed**

The Bible is a book of seeds. This seed principle is the key to the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:1-23. The purpose of the parable is to indicate the need to make room for the word of God. Worry, worldliness, unbelief, carelessness or a hard attitude will rob the word of God of power.

The Bible shows that thoughts are seeds of actions. Jesus said that thinking adultery and murder were equal to committing the actions [Matthew 5:22, 28]. In the same way, if we entertain the thoughts of the Bible, they will be the seed-bed of our conduct. If we think on pure and honourable things then this will shape our lives [Philippians 4:8]. By reading, believing and obeying the Bible, we will become living epistles, and inherit its promises.

##### ❖ **We are to read with humility**

The key of knowledge is not the Bible alone, but the Bible read with the right attitude. In Luke 11:52 Jesus rebukes the lawyers for taking away the key of knowledge, and thereby neither entering themselves nor allowing others to enter. There is no doubt that the lawyers spent most of their lives debating and studying the

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Scriptures. It was not the knowledge of the Scriptures they lacked; it was a humble heart to read them properly.

### ❖ **We are to read with a heart that seeks God**

Jesus reveals in John 5:39 that the Scriptures are a stepping-stone to come to Him. The Scriptures are not an end in themselves. He rebukes the Pharisees for searching the Scriptures for their own sake. As we meditate on the Bible, Christ reaches down and touches our lives.

### ❖ **We are to read with faith!**

The Bible can be misinterpreted through unbelief: In Luke 24:25 Jesus reproves the disciples for not believing what the prophets had said about His resurrection. If they had believed, they would have understood. The same is true for us: if we do not believe the Bible, we will be tempted to believe that Jesus cannot do miracles today, or that our prayers will only be answered in difficult circumstances. Some Christians believe that since the time of the apostles God has stopped doing miracles. If we do not believe in a God of miracles, we will not experience miracles!

### ❖ **We are to check what preachers say with a true and honourable attitude**

When Paul preached in Berea, the Jewish believers “*were more fair-minded (Greek: honourable) than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so*” [Acts 17:11].

### ❖ **We are to read all of the Bible**

The Bible can be misinterpreted by taking verses out of context, and by not considering the whole teaching of the Bible. Satan tempted Jesus by quoting the Scripture in Matthew 4:5-6, tempting Jesus to force God’s hand to perform an amazing sign. But Jesus said, “*It is written again....*” [Matthew 4:7]. It is vital that Christians understand the whole counsel of God and not merely their favourite doctrines.

## **2. Keys to Reading the Bible with our Heart**

### **(a) Wait on the Lord**

It is vital to cultivate a quiet, peaceable spirit in which the Word of God drops like a pebble in a clear spring of water. We are to sit at the feet of Jesus like Mary and heed His Word as we meditate on the Bible [Luke 10:38-42].

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### **(b) Stand in the Counsel of the Lord and Mark His Word** [Jeremiah 23]

We 'mark' His word by meditating on it. "*Reading without meditation is unfruitful; meditation without reading is hurtful; to meditate and to read without prayer upon both is without blessing.*" [William Bridge, Puritan Writer].

Jeremiah exposed the false prophets and showed the right way to serve the Lord. Hearing what the Bible says is the foundational art of the true prophet. Isaiah 8:20 teaches: "*If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.*"

### **(c) Receive the Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation** [Ephesians 1:17]

In Luke 24 Jesus approached two disciples on the Emmaus road. They did not recognise Him. Jesus corrected their blindness by expounding the Scriptures and explaining what they say about Him. In verse 32 the disciples state that Jesus "*opened the Scriptures*". In verse 31 it says "*their eyes were opened and they knew Him*". Later the same day Jesus appeared to the disciples and "*opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures*" [Luke 24:45]. The Bible teaches here that we need help from Christ Himself if we are to understand the Bible.

### **(d) Ask, Take, and Eat!** [Revelation 10]

The Bible is the 'little book' that triggers prophecy. Revelation chapter 10 is an interlude in the teaching of Revelation and is a personal impartation of God to John to renew His prophetic ministry. It is an example to all ministers on how they can renew their ministry. The steps in the process are as follows:

- John is commanded to take the little book out of the angel's hand [10:8]. Bible reading is not an option; it is obedience to a command.
- John asks for the book [10:9]. Believers must ask for the Bible in prayer. Owning a copy is not enough.
- The angel commands John to take the book and eat it [10:9]. We must not merely read, we must take Bible truth into our spiritual hearts so that it will become part of our lives.
- The Bible is sweet to the taste, but bitter in its effects [10:10]. This is because it is incredibly beautiful and sweet to the soul, but has the power to convict, and to bring the believer into the groanings which are the fruit of the Spirit in us.

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- The Bible in John unlocks even more prophetic utterance [10:11]. Where the Bible drops into believing hearts, the effect is to beget ministry, utterance and understanding of unseen things and of the future. The result is supernatural or prophetic understanding. This prophetic dimension is to be part of God's people at all times.

### **3. The Rediscovery of the Bible is a Prelude to Revival**

2 Kings 22-23 gives us an example from the Old Testament.

The Temple had been locked up and neglected throughout the long 52 years of Manasseh's reign. Dust and decay had reduced the holy places to heaps of rubbish. Damp, mould and vermin had damaged the treasure of the nation to the brink of no return. Then King Josiah commanded the priests to cleanse the Temple. As they carefully sifted through the rubbish, there they found the ancient copy of the Law, probably the book of Deuteronomy. *"Then Hilkiah the High Priest said to Shaphan the scribe: 'I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord.'"* [2 Kings 22:8]. When the Law was read out to the king, this led to great repentance on his part, and a partial revival in the nation - which did not, however, go deep enough.

There are treasures hidden in people's hearts, buried through years of sin, disobedience and prayerlessness. They neglect reading the Bible, but most serious of all, their inner faculty of knowing God is dead and buried. But God commands the cleansing of the temple of our heart. He commands the treasures to be fully restored before they are lost forever.

How do we cleanse and refresh our inner life? Put away doubtful habits. Light up the heart with praise and wait quietly on God. As the inner eye becomes accustomed to the different light that shines from the presence of God, the believer sees his own heart in a fresh light for the first time. It is by the inner faculty of the heart that we know God. We are to 'sweep' our heart each day, expose our soul to the light of His presence, and look up to see the God who reveals Himself through His Son.

### **4. Discipline - the Mark of a Disciple**

Disciples should be known by their commitment to knowing and obeying the Word of God. At its most practical level, this means that we read our Bibles at every opportunity. It is good to read several chapters a day. Someone who reads three chapters a day will read the whole Bible in one year.

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As we read and meditate on individual verses, we can pray that God will speak to us. We can make a note of what God is speaking to us, and pray for wisdom how to obey. It is helpful to read a chapter and a book of the Bible over and over again, praying for understanding. We should read prayerfully, depending on God for understanding and the Holy Spirit for illumination.

The disciple knows that the Word of God is Jesus, not just a book. So knowing the Word is more than just Bible knowledge. The Pharisees knew the Bible but were not disciples of Jesus! The disciple uses the Bible to reach out and know Jesus, who is the Living Word of God.

### **5. Faith in the Inspiration of the Scriptures**

This is a very basic point, but there is a danger, when believers are seeking God for fresh moves of His Spirit, that the Scriptures are no longer consulted and seen as the sole guide. Only where the Bible is honoured, and read with eagerness and hunger, is the Holy Spirit poured out. The parable of the sower indicates that the growth of the harvest is due to the conditions being right for the growth of the seed/word. The Word of God is the seed, and the water, the Holy Spirit, comes to germinate the seed/word in the hearts of believers.

There is a danger that believers become hungry for a move of God but neglect reading the Bible. When God comes with power then remarkable and unusual things begin to happen. Wesley tells of sinners lying on the ground prostrate before God, almost unconscious for hours. Jonathan Edwards tells of his wife going into a trance for hours. Things like this may occur, and also other manifestations that may puzzle the onlookers. While these things are exciting when they happen, there is the danger that we begin to believe that every such manifestation is from God. This is, of course, not the case, and we must try the spirits to see what is from God [1 John 4:1].

Believers must be firmly anchored in the Word of God, or there will be deceiving spirits at work in the midst of a move of God. If they are unchecked then the move of God will be weakened and may even be dissipated. In the worst cases there will be demonic activity that confuses and damages the confidence of believers. Sometimes a move of God will collapse if the Word is not preached and studied, along with the abandonment to the move of the Spirit.

The Book of Acts tells of the multiplication of the Church but also speaks of the growth of the Word. This implies that there is an essential life that is imparted as Scriptures are believed in and preached. The dramatic growth of the Church in Ephesus was described by Luke as: *“the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed”* [Acts 19:20].

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Acts 6:7 tells of the multiplication of the Word leading to the multiplication of the numbers of disciples. (See also Acts 12:24.) The apostles devoted themselves to the preaching of the Word and prayer [Acts 6:2-4]. Paul gave to Timothy the most solemn charge in all of his writings:

*“I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word.”* [2 Timothy 4:1-2]

If there is to be true lasting growth of the Church in depth and in numbers of truly converted men and women, then there must be a deep dedication to the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. Paul’s letter to Timothy and the great charge quoted above is given in the context of other voices arising to tempt preachers astray from the clear path of the Spirit. This charge is more relevant today than ever.

This does not mean a return to intellectualism or exaltation of the mind! It means a soaking in the written word and in the presence of God so that the living prophetic application of the Word may shake and shape the culture in which we live, and destroy the strongholds of philosophies, religions and demonic powers that hold sinners in bondage. It also does not mean a return to a dry evangelicalism that exalts the Bible to the point of idolatry. God is revealed through the Bible, and so Bible study is not an end in itself but a path to fellowship with the living God, who lives and works in people today.

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter quoted from Joel and from the Psalms. There is great power to release the presence of God by the use of the Scriptures, both in private devotion and in public speaking. The Holy Spirit will be poured out upon the Word of God.

### **6. ‘Soul Nourishment First’ by George Muller**

Finally, we will look at the example of George Muller, who found that his prayer life was dry until he began to meditate on the Scriptures before praying. Here is the text of a booklet he wrote:

#### **Soul Nourishment First**

“It has pleased the Lord to teach me a truth, the benefit of which I have not lost, for more than fourteen years. The point is this:

I saw more clearly than ever that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not how much I might serve the Lord, or how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my

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soul into a happy state, and how my inner man might be nourished. For I might seek to set the truth before the unconverted, I might seek to benefit believers, I might seek to relieve the distressed, I might in other ways seek to behave myself as it becomes a child of God in this world; and yet, not being happy in the Lord, and not being nourished and strengthened in my inner man day by day, all this might not be attended to in a right spirit.

Before this time my practice had been, at least for ten years previously, as an habitual thing, to give myself to prayer, after having dressed myself in the morning. Now, 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, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reprov'd, instructed; and that thus, by means of the Word of God, while meditating on it, my heart might be brought into experiential communion with the Lord.

I began therefore to meditate on the New Testament from the beginning, early in the morning. The first thing I did, after having asked in a few words the Lord's blessing upon his precious Word, was, to begin to meditate on the Word of God, searching as it were into every verse, to get blessing out of it; not for the sake of the public ministry of the Word, not for the sake of preaching on what I had meditated upon, but for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul.

The result I have found to be almost invariably this, that after a very few minutes my soul has been led to confession, or to thanksgiving, or to intercession, or to supplication; so that, though I did not, as it were, give myself to prayer, but to meditation, yet it turned almost immediately more or less into prayer. When thus I have been for a while making confession or intercession, or supplication, or have given thanks, I go to the next words or verse, turning all, as I go on, into prayer for myself or others, as the Word may lead to it, but still continually keeping before me that food for my own soul is the object of my meditation. The result of this is, that there is always a good deal of confession, thanksgiving, supplication, or intercession mingled with my meditation, and then my inner man almost invariably is even sensibly nourished and strengthened, and that by breakfast time, with rare exceptions, I am in a peaceful if not happy state of heart. Thus also the Lord is pleased to communicate unto me that which, either very soon after or at a later time, I have found to become food for other believers, though it was not for the sake of the public ministry of the Word that I gave myself to meditation, but for the profit of my own inner man.

The difference, then, between my former practice and my present one is this: Formerly, when I rose, I began to pray as soon as possible, and

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generally spent all my time till breakfast in prayer, or almost all the time. At all events I almost invariably began with prayer, except when I felt my soul to be more than usually barren, in which case I read the Word of God for food, or for refreshment, or for a revival and renewal of my inner man, before I gave myself to prayer.

But what was the result? I often spent a quarter of an hour, or half an hour, or even an hour, on my knees, before being conscious to myself of having derived comfort, encouragement, humbling of soul, etc., and often, after having suffered much from wandering of mind for the first ten minutes, or a quarter of an hour, or even half an hour, I only then began really to pray. I scarcely ever suffer now in this way. For my heart, first being nourished by the truth, being brought into experiential fellowship with God, I then speak to my Father and to my Friend, (vile though I am, and unworthy of it), about the things that He has brought before me in His precious Word.

It often now astonishes me that I did not sooner see this point. In no book did I ever read about it. No public ministry ever brought the matter before me. No private intercourse with a brother stirred me up to this matter. And yet, now, since God has taught me this point, it is as plain to me as anything, that the first thing the child of God has to do morning by morning is, to obtain food for his inner man. As the outward man is not fit for work for any length of time except we take food, and as this is one of the first things we do in the morning, so it should be with the inner man. We should take food for that, as everyone must allow.

Now, what is the food for the inner man? Not prayer, but the Word of God; and here again, 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. When we pray, we speak to God. Now, prayer, in order to be continued for any length of time in any other than a formal manner, requires, generally speaking, a measure of strength or godly desire, and the season, therefore, when this exercise of the soul can be most effectually performed is after the inner man has been nourished by meditation on the Word of God, where we find our Father speaking to us, to encourage us, to comfort us, to instruct us, to humble us, to reprove us. We may therefore profitably meditate, with God's blessing, though we are ever so weak spiritually; nay, the weaker we are, the more we need meditation for the strengthening of our inner man.

Thus there is far less to be feared from wandering of mind than if we give ourselves to prayer without having had time previously for meditation. I dwell so particularly on this point because of the immense

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spiritual profit and refreshment I am conscious of having derived from it myself, and I affectionately and solemnly beseech all my fellow believers to ponder this matter. By the blessing of God, I ascribe to this mode the help and strength which I have had from God to pass in peace through deeper trials, in various ways, than I had ever had before; and after having now above fourteen years tried this way, I can most fully, in the fear of God, commend it.

In addition to this I generally read, after family prayer, larger portions of the Word of God, when I still pursue my practice of reading regularly onward in the Holy Scriptures, sometimes in the New Testament, and sometimes in the Old, and for more than twenty-six years I have proved the blessedness of it. I take, also, either then or at other parts of the day, time more especially for prayer. How different, when the soul is refreshed and made happy early in the morning, from what it is when without spiritual preparation, the service, the trials, and the temptations of the day come upon one."

[George Muller, 9 May 1841]