

Shaped by the Word

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Date: 26 January 2014

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[0 : 00] Today we're, let me introduce myself, I'm Chris by the way, if you don't know me, I help oversee the community groups here at Watermark. And today we're going to be looking at a topic of God's Word.

After New Year we're going to look at a series in the book of Romans and we're going to see that God's Word is meant to shape our lives. But our world, if you think about it, is a world of speech. Everything around us is communicating to us. Every day, experiences, advertisements, movies, people speak to us.

The beginning of the passage in Psalm 19 that we read says it's not just people who speak to us, the whole of creation speaks to us. If you look outside at the sea behind you, you look at the mountains over there and they are speaking to you about the glory of God.

But the thing is, with all this communication that is going on around us, our problem, our issue, our task is that we need to interpret what things are saying to us.

[1 : 23] We need a lens through which we can interpret all the messages that are coming at us day after day after day. We need an interpretation grid which enables us to make sense of life and which enables us to filter things so that in this world and where we're so often lost in our relationships, in our work, in all kinds of things, we have something which enables us to interpret life correctly.

And the Christian claim is that God's Word, the Bible, is the ultimate lens through which your life should be shaped.

In fact, if God's Word is not shaping your life, then somebody else's Word is. If God's Word is not shaping your life, somebody else's Word is.

He agrees. I've planned that. It's okay. There'll be more noises going on through the sermon. So today we're going to look in two parts, really.

The first part of what I want to talk about is really how God's Word, why should we read God's Word? Then we're going to have a testimony from David here, and then afterwards we're going to look at some ways that we maybe misuse the Bible, and then finally looking at what is the Bible trying to do so that we can really understand how it shapes our lives.

[3 : 00] But I don't know. Let's think about this. I don't know what your experience of reading the Bible is. For me, I think there are probably at least four different types of Christians who interact with God's Word.

The first type, I call them the starvation cases. These are the people, they rely on handouts every Sunday through the sermon, but the rest of the week, they're not engaged at all with God's Word.

Now, it can be because life is just sometimes too busy for them. It can be they've already downloaded that Bible app on their phone, but you know, there's another little icon next to it.

It's got a white F on it with a blue background. And suddenly, just as you come to read the Bible, that F seems so much more attractive. If you don't know what I'm talking, I'm talking Facebook.

We can chomp through hours of Facebook, but actually not get true nutrition through our week with starvation cases. There are some others who I call the snackers.

[4 : 09] These are the people who rely on the kind of one verse a day devotionals. Now, don't get me wrong. I think snacking is great. It's good for you.

It can stave off hunger. It can just get you through the day. But it's not the way to live a healthy life. It's the Bible equivalent of trying to live off pretzels. That is not a balanced diet.

It's the snackers. Then there are what I call the mouthwash cases. They kind of wash the Bible around their mouths, maybe pretty regularly, every day even.

But they spit it out before it gets anywhere close to being digested properly. Because if it was going to really digest in them, their lives would change.

They would respond. And it would radically make a difference in the way that they live. Starvation cases, snackers, mouthwashers. Then the final category are what I call the active Bible foodies.

[5 : 10] These are the people who can't get enough of God's Word. They're always eating it. But they're not couch potato Christians who just eat and just sit on the sofa. These are the Christians who God's Word makes them active because they want to put it into practice.

They want to live it out. It gives them legs. It gives them energy to live out as God wants them to live. Now, the danger is that we, as you think about it, we say, well, I'm definitely the Bible foodie. Or you can say, well, I'm none of those. But I've been reading the Bible regularly for probably between 28 and 29 years. And I can tell you that at various times, I can be all of those.

And so we need to think of ourselves, why should we read God's Word? Why should we? And we're going to look into this passage in Psalm 19.

And this first part, I just want to look under four different sections. Why should we be in God's Word? Firstly, because it is perfect. Secondly, because it revives the soul.

[6 : 25] Thirdly, because it makes wise the simple. And fourthly, it rejoices the heart. Okay? So firstly, it is perfect.

Now, you see all the way through, there are different words that it uses. It uses testimony. It uses precepts, commandment, fear, rules. They're all talking about God's Word.

They're all saying the same thing. But it says, when he says, the law of the Lord is perfect, that word there means flawless. It says the testimony of the Lord is sure.

Sure. That word sure means trustworthy. You can trust it. When it says the precepts of the Lord are right, that word right means straight, like a plumb line, by which you can measure all kinds of other opinions, other ideas, and attitudes.

And this is the standard by which you can measure them. Now, sometimes we may have a problem with that. We think, well, there are things in the Bible that seem to be a bit out of date.

[7 : 31] Then they just don't kind of fit in with modern society. How can you say that it's flawless? Well, just think for a minute. In some cultures, they love the idea of Christian morality and ethics that comes from the Bible.

Even if they're not Christians, they think it teaches you to be good moral citizens. It's a good thing to have. But then those same people who love the morality, for the people, when the Bible tells you about forgiveness and grace, even to those who break the rules, that for them is a far bigger problem.

But then in other cultures, and increasingly our own, we hate the idea of morality, that someone should tell me how to live, but we like the idea of a God of love and forgiveness.

You see, most of our lives, actually, we live conditioned by our culture. We are defined by what cultures and circumstances tell us.

And yet the Bible is there to critique and bring that plumb line, that standard against every single culture and every single experience.

[8 : 52] That is the measure by which God says there is a standard which is higher than your culture. There's a standard which will lead your culture to be critiqued in a way which will make it healthier.

That's what the Bible wants to do. It is trustworthy. It is perfect. Secondly, the Bible revives the soul. Now, this word revives actually literally means it brings back or it restores the self, your inner being, who you really are, your identity.

In other words, what it's saying is the Bible is there to remake you to be the person that you were always meant to be. That's an incredible claim.

Because we often say things like, you know, I just need to be true to myself. Or I just want to find the real me. I don't know if any of you found the real me yet.

But the claim here is that if you saturate yourself in God's word, you will not only discover the way to go in life, you will also be remade to be who you were truly meant to be.

[10 : 06] You will discover your true identity. The reverse is also true. If you don't soak yourself in God's word and walk in the light of it, you will never be who God has truly made you to be.

Because if you're defined in life, you're either defined by what God says about you, or you're defined by what other people say about you, or by what you say about yourself.

And neither of those last two sources is reliable. Third thing. So, you've seen it's perfect. It revives the soul. Third thing. It makes wise the simple.

Now, what does that mean? Wisdom in the Bible means to, is knowing how to live well. Knowing how to make right decisions. The simple are people who don't know how to live well.

Now, you may say to yourself now, Chris, thanks, but I've lived all these years. I'm doing pretty well in my life so far. Thank you. Some ancient book is not going to tell me how I'm going to live my life.

[11 : 16] Now, just bear with me with one moment, because Tim Keller puts it, the American preacher, he puts it like this. He says, think back 15 years in your life.

Some of you who are in youth, that might be difficult. Okay? But as far as you can go, think back. If you're 20, think back to when you were five. How wise were you when you were five?

Well, you can look back and you think, man, I can't believe that I thought like that. You know, you're five, you just learned to tie your shoelace and you think you've achieved the greatest achievement in the world.

Or you look back 15 years and you look at the clothes that you used to wear and you think, man, and I thought that was cool. Because you look back 15 years and there are so many things where you can say, man, I was a complete fool then, wasn't I?

Or you look back to your grandmother or your grandfather and look at what they believed. And you think, how could anybody believe that? It's crazy. You even look in what you invested 10, 15 years ago.

[12 : 29] Is that the same as what you invest in today? You look in academia and universities. Are the theories that people believed 20 years ago the same as what they believe today? No, you think, oh, it's so simplistic how they thought back then.

But think about that. Because if we were actually fools back then, transport yourself 15 years in the future and look back at yourself today.

What are you going to say about yourself? You're going to say, I can't believe that I was thinking that back in 2014. What a fool. Which means that actually today all of us are fools.

Sorry to break it to you. But the Bible says that if you are shaped by the wisdom of the age, the wisdom of Hollywood, of Cosmopolitan magazine, of the philosophers of now, in a few years' time, what you're believing now is going to be seen as foolishness.

But if you hold on to the word of God now, it said it endures throughout all generations.

[13 : 48] And so if you are putting your trust and following what the Bible says now, what that will mean is you will look back in 15 years' time and you won't have regrets.

You will learn how to be wise now. How to make right decisions now. The Bible makes wise the simple.

Fourthly, the Bible rejoices the heart. God's word is there to give you joy. It is there to captivate and transform your desires so that you see something is more beautiful than you have ever known before.

Just look at that verse 10. It says, It is more to be desired than gold, even much fine gold, sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

Now, I don't know about you, but if you hear that, and I was to offer you, okay, here is all the jewelry of Chao Taifouk on this side, and here is the Bible, okay?

[15 : 01] What are you going to choose? Now, I'm going to take the jewelry anytime. Or you could say, give me a flat or a million dollars or the Bible.

What are you going to choose? For most of us, it's a no-brainer. We say, well, we're going to choose the money. But David here, he's saying something completely different.

He's saying, you could put a million dollars in my bank account, but I would trade it all just to have God's word constantly before me and in my heart.

How can he say that? Because he's saying something here is so precious, so valuable, that actually, if you understand its value, you understand that it makes you wise for life, it can give you joy that nothing else can give, you're going to go after it like nothing else.

And it may surprise you, but what David is reading here, he doesn't have the whole of the Bible.

He's actually probably got the first five books of the Bible in the Old Testament.

[16 : 11] Now, if you've read some of the first five books in the Bible, you go to Leviticus, for example. I don't know the last time you went to Leviticus and you thought, wow, this is better than the best dessert I could ever have.

Give me just one more helping of a chapter of Leviticus. I don't know. But for David, the Word of God is not just some rules or instructions.

It's delightful because it reveals to him the desirable and delightful God. That's why he wants it more than anything else, because he's captivated by God, and if you're captivated by God, you'll be captivated by His Word.

I'm going to invite David just to come up and to share with us how God's Word has been at work in his life.

So, David, if you could just introduce yourself to Watermark, tell us who you are. My name is David, David Liu, and I'm a seminary student, married, fortunately, and good for the sisters and good for the brothers as well.

[17:30] And married, that's my wife, Amanda, and a teacher. She's a teacher. I'm a student. And that's me.

Great. Thank you, David. So, could you tell us just briefly, how has God's Word impacted your life in the past? Impact my life is how I see things differently from before I believed and after I believed in our Lord Jesus.

And in the past, I see things as like all the down part. and I see only the tragedies. But now I see all the good parts, all the hope of this world that Jesus has given us.

I think that's the difference. Another thing is like in the past, I don't want to communicate with people. I think it's kind of useless. It's meaningless to communicate.

There's nothing to communicate because everything just goes to zero, to nothing. But now I see things differently. Now I see things, oh, wow, I have this precious good news to share with people.

[18:45] And that's the difference. So maybe you could tell us something about how you became a Christian and how God's Word was involved in you coming to faith in Christ.

My faith starts from, I would say it's the valley of the shadow of life. Start from there. Because when I was 13 years old, my mom passed away.

And that was a very tough time. And you have your beloved mother there. And every day you go back home, you can have food, you have family time.

And then one day, everything is gone. And you can see her there and lifeless, breathless, and cold. And it was, it's time to stop there. And you don't know where your future is like. And you lost hope. It took me 10 years to walk out of the valley of the shadow of life.

[19:53] And I was thinking about the meaning of life. What does it mean for us? What is life? And when I was in college, I majored in English.

I just love literature. Literature, in them, I just like reading the tragedies. All the tragedies. In the tragedies, I found the happiness of life.

I still remember William Faulkner, his book, Sound and Fury. Sound and Fury. And then I just think about what does Sound and Fury mean?

And then I just check the food and everything. Okay, it goes back to Macbeth and William Shakespeare wrote the book. And I just check there and it's like, he said, life is but a walking shadow.

A poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage. And he's heard no more. It is tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

[20:58] I think to me, it's life just like that. It's just like a walking shadow. So how did the Bible then change your perspective? Yeah, from there, just from literature, I saw, oh wow, so many people, famous poets, writers, and they just quote it from the Bible.

I just got interested in the Bible. I think, wow, it's so powerful. And so many famous people, they just go back to the Bible and think, why? I got so interested into the Bible.

I think, oh wow, I must have one. I read it to see what difference it is like. And then, there was one, one day I was in this class, it's Bible class, it's as literature.

And this teacher asked me, do you have Bible? I said, oh, I only have a New Testament. And she said, we study the full Bible, you know, Old Testament and New. And she, the second class, she just handed me a Bible in a very small NIV version with brown color.

I started to read. And read, and the teacher just in class, she said, in Genesis, chapter 3, verse 15, about the judgment, God judged the serpent and said, you, your head will be crushed by the woman's offspring.

[22 : 18] And you will strike his heel. And the teacher just reminded us, when we went through the Bible and see different characters, and she just asked us, is he the one?

And he said, no, he's not. And I was, I keep reading, looking forward to this one, the promised seed, the conquered serpent. And only when I went to the office and asked, teacher, who is the promised one?

And she just answered me, keep on reading, you'll find out. And then, when finally I got to the New Testament, and I, I, I, I, I met Jesus there.

And in his life, I just found that he's so different from us. All of us just seek for money, and we seek for power, and we seek for longevity.

And he didn't seek for anything of this, for, for money. He didn't even have money to pay the tax. He, he told Peter, go to the water, find fish, God come from there.

[23 : 24] He didn't have, and all these ministries, supported by the, are faithful women. And for the power, he didn't, give us, give up all the power. He just, people said, you, you will be a king, Hosanna to the highest.

But he, chose the way of the cross, and, could be crucified. And for, many other things we saw for, he didn't seek for.

And, I just, in him, I see the meaning of life. And I read the Bible, it says, meaningless, meaningless. Says the teacher, utterly meaningless. Everything is meaningless.

And think, wow, that's so true about life. Everything is meaningless. But in Jesus, found meaning. He said, you have, eternal life. But, you just don't want to come to me.

And for a whole year, I just kind of want to escape, because, he's so pure, he's, holy. And to me, I'm just a sinner. I have the reading, by my notes, I see people, everyone around me, president, or parents, neighbors, famous people, everyone is a sinner.

[24 : 34] And, there's no hope, in this world. And, in Jesus, I found different. For one year, I just think about life, and try to escape. And then, in 2003, there was something happen.

It was SARS time. And, when you walk on the street, you see so many people wearing masks, it's so horrible, spooky. And, I really think about life, and what, what came to me if I die?

I read the Bible, and know for sure, that I will go to hell, because I'm a sinner. And, I think about life, and, the Bible is telling me, and Jesus told us, I am the way, the truth, the life.

Without me, no one goes to the Father. I think, oh, for me, it's hopeless. From heaven on earth, no one I can rely on.

And, he said, he's the only way. And, there was, one day, I just asked a teacher, to share about this, all my journey. And, she just said, you have to leave. And, she led me into this prayer, and this, and became a Christian.

[25 : 43] And, now, I see things differently, see people, see life. How, how does it change you now? So, finally, how does it, how does it change you now? What do you see differently now? It's like, in the past, even from simple things, for, let's say, marriage.

In the past, I didn't see any hope, in marriage. Because, two people get gathered, and start to fight. And, some of them, sometimes, we can see the health, you know, the marriage, just say goodbye to each other, and, God, deep wounded, and hurt.

I see, there's no hope. Why? Why bother? Don't get married. It's hopeless. But, after, believe, I see the witness of brothers, and sisters, and see the lives, so different.

And, I see marriage, just gift from God, from our Lord. And, I started to hope for, for marriage. And, I just pray, Lord, give me, a perfect wife.

Like, many people. And, I found, it's different. It's like, it's not your wife, it's also you. You must be, reborn. And, then, I have, prayed for a long time.

[26 : 55] Then, there was one day, I met this, this girl. I see this girl, and, I said, oh, wow, who is the lucky guy, that gets married to this girl? And, ultimately, I'm, the guy, the lucky guy.

So, it's like, one part of me, that's, sitting differently. Great. Let me stop you there. Let me just pray for you. Thank you. Father, thank you for, David, thank you for the way, that you've used your word, to change him, to work in his life.

And, I pray that you continue to do that. Even as he, goes back to the seminary now, I pray that you just continue, to show him more of you, give him your lenses on life, Lord.

Thank you for the hope, that you've given him. Amen. Amen. Great. So, you see, the Bible does change, the way we view, life.

But, I think, one of our problems, with, when we kind of, come to think about the Bible, is we often misinterpret, what the Bible, is actually, doing, and is supposed, to work.

[28 : 06] I'm going to just give you, three quick ways, in how, we can misinterpret the Bible, and, and then come to see, well, how does the Bible, really, what is it trying to do, in our lives?

So, let's, let's go, the first way, we can misinterpret, we can treat the Bible, as just a set, of directions. For in life, we're often lost, like David, we don't know, which way to go.

We're like, we're in a city, we're not sure, how to get to our destination. And so, in our relationships, in our finances, in our work, in our education, and so what we do, we come to the Bible, and say, okay, I need the Bible, to tell me, when to turn left, when to turn right, okay, and when to go straight ahead.

And so, sometimes we do, what I call, the flip and dip approach, is, you know, you've got your appraisal tomorrow, your job appraisal, or your exam tomorrow, and so you think, okay, I need, I need some encouragement, I need God to speak to me, in some way.

So you open the Bible, and then you kind of put your finger in, and it says, stand still, and the Lord will deliver you. And you think, hallelujah, the Lord has spoken to me.

[29 : 13] And then you read it again, and it says, stand still. And you think, ooh, does that mean I don't have to prepare? And you get confused, because you're not sure, what the Bible is meant to be telling you, in that direction.

Or you go to it with questions like, what does the Bible say about dating? And you flick through the Bible about dating, and the word dating doesn't appear anywhere. And so you think, it doesn't have anything to say about dating, so I've got to go to Lady Gaga, because obviously, she's a far more reliable dating guide.

That's a joke. Or your kids, where do I send my kids to school? And you look in the Bible and say, obviously, it doesn't have anything to say to me about that. But the problem is, we're treating the Bible as just a kind of set of, go left, go right directions.

And we're actually making the Bible fundamentally about me. It's about fixing my problems now. But the Bible is not fundamentally about you.

It's fundamentally about God. And about what God's plans, and God's purposes, and God's design for the world is. And what it does, it lays out, it defines your identity, it defines your meaning, it defines purpose, and it's like a scanner, which scans your life, and shows you the areas where you're not healthy, and tells you, here is where the cure is to be found.

[30 : 36] It's more like the helicopter vision of the city. It takes you up and beyond when you're stuck down just asking for directions. And it will show you all the dead ends, all the places where you need to avoid on the journey that God is taking you on.

You will see so much more, a bigger vision, a bigger lens through which you see life, if you begin to see it's not just directions for you, for the minutiae of life.

And if you're like me, and somebody gives you directions, I've forgotten them after I've taken the first turning. So it's hopeless for me. But that's not the way the Bible is working. So we can treat it just as directions.

Second way, we can treat it just as information, rather than a call to relationship. Relationship with a personal God. If you notice in the text, it actually keeps saying the word Lord.

The word of the Lord. And actually, that word Lord is the word in the Old Testament, Yahweh, which is the word that God revealed himself to. It's his personal name.

[31 : 44] That when he came into a covenant with the people of Israel, a relational agreement, he was saying, I am your personal God. You are my personal people.

And I want to speak to you personally. I want relationship with you. So when I speak to you, I want a response, because I want relationship with you.

Now imagine, my wife says to me, how are you doing? How was your day today? And I say, I'm sorry we've had this conversation before. Could you say something a little bit more profound?

Or imagine, my wife says, could you go to the shops and just get some food, some meat, some vegetables, something like that. And I say, thank you for speaking to me today.

I think I've already heard that sentence before. Or you even go to your friends and you say, do you know, my wife asked me to pick up some things from the shops. It's an interesting request. What do you think about that?

[32 : 43] And then someone said, well, I imagine in the original Chinese, that what she was really saying was a reference to the increasing supermarket prices at the beginning of the 21st century. But I don't go and pick up the vegetables. I've treated it as information, not as relationship. Because relationship calls you to respond.

And people can go from Bible study to Bible study, sermon to sermon, and you hear it and you say, that was a nice talk. But you don't respond. You don't change.

And you've missed the point. The Bible is to call you into relationship. It is God speaking to you personally, saying, I want relationship with you. Now respond.

Come to me. I want to change you. It's dynamic. If we don't, we're just doing mouthwash Bible reading. So we can treat it as just directions.

[33 : 40] We can treat it just as information. Thirdly, we can treat it just as an individual exercise. The Psalms were actually originally written as part of the common life of the community of Israel.

But I also put in here the passage from Colossians. It says, You see, God's word is not just meant to be for you individually.

Yes, it is meant to be for you, but it's also to be shared in community. Do you realize most of the early Christians actually couldn't read? So they listened to the Bible being read.

They memorized it. They learned songs about it. They shared the stories with each other. It was a communal experience. The Bible was not what we often do, which is we just read it by ourselves, and then everything we learn just stays in the room.

That's not how the Bible is meant to work. Yes, you are meant to read it by yourself. You are meant to engage it by yourself. But it's also meant to be shared with others. So actually, as a community, you are growing in the Bible together.

[35 : 03] We have WhatsApp. We have communication channels. We have so many ways that we can talk about God's word. And if we really believe what the Bible says, that it's the source of all wisdom, it's the source of joy, it is so precious and valuable, then surely the conversation of the community should be just flowing abundantly filled with God's word.

When you leave a sermon, do you realize you're not meant to just go home and just say, that was a nice sermon? Do you realize you're actually supposed to talk about it with other people? Do you realize that I sometimes start talking about it in this way.

I start saying, so what did you think of the sermon today? Never ask that question. That is the wrong question to do. Because what you're inviting people to do is just to be critiquers. You're inviting them just to be mouthwash Christians.

Rather, it's far better to say, what did you learn about God today? How did God speak to you this morning? What do you need to change in your life in the light of what you heard today?

Or in the light of what you read this week? Because that's going to get you away from being a mouthwash Christian into being someone who is an active Bible foodie. So there's three different ways that we can misuse it.

[36 : 24] We can treat it as directions, we can treat it as information, we can treat it just as individual experience. But finally, what is the Bible trying to do with us? Let's just go back to the psalm very quickly.

Verse 12. It says, Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins.

Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless and innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

There's one thing that's worst of being lost in a city, lost in your relationships, lost in all these other things, and not knowing where the way is.

It's being lost and not knowing that you're lost. It's thinking that you're healthy when in fact you're riddled with disease. Who can discern his errors?

[37 : 31] There are areas of my life that I don't even know are a problem in my life. There are places in this community where we don't even realize that we're sometimes not being what God wants us to be.

What the Bible is trying to do, it's trying to reveal to you a God who is so much greater, who is so much more beautiful, who is so much more glorious than our own existence.

And as you see how amazing he is, you look through the Old Testament, you see that people messed up time and time again, and yet God was just so faithful to them. When you see that actually the God who hates injustice and reaches out to the poor, and then you look at your own life in the mirror of God himself, and you see how far short you fall, the Bible exposes you.

And some of us don't like that because that's not very pleasant. But the thing is, the Bible is not exposing you like a nagging teacher or a headmaster who's constantly picking out your faults and condemning you.

That's not what he's doing. He's revealing God to you because as you see your own need of God, you will run back to him and realize that the one who wants to speak to you is the one who was nailed on a cross for you.

[39 : 07] He's the one who was the redeemer. He's the one who declares you innocent of your hidden faults. He's the one who's dealt with it all.

He's the one who wants to speak to you because he wants to restore you to the way that you were meant to be with him. We have a God who speaks and he wants to speak to you through his word. Just finally, as we think about it, God's word is meant to be wisdom. It's meant to be your joy. It's meant to be your life. It's desirable. It's meant to change and be a lens through which you see life. It's to bring you in a relationship with God. But finally, some of you may be thinking, okay, I've read the Bible before and I find it difficult.

Sometimes so do I. Sometimes it's not always easy. But here's just a few practical things that you can think about to help you to get into your word because if it is what it says it is, it's the most important thing that you should be shaping your life around.

[40 : 22] So here's just a few things. One, get a Bible. That's a no-brainer. If you haven't got a Bible, we've got some Bibles over the back. Download an app.

There's YouVersion. If you know that, it's a Bible app you can put on your phone. Get a Bible.

Secondly, give yourself some structure. Set a regular time every day.

If you don't set a regular time and a regular place that you're going to do it, let me tell you, you'll have great intentions but within about one day you will have stopped. Give yourself a structure.

Give yourself just 10 minutes a day even to start with, to be engaging with it. And don't just sit down and think, oh, what am I going to read today? Plan what you're going to read. We have at the back, there are some Bible reading journals.

There's only a few left. But they're there to help you, to give you an idea of what to read and they've got some questions to help you to respond to what you read. Thirdly, don't just read it but reflect on it.

[41 : 23] I know so many people who just read it, they do their Bible reading and then they say, oh, great, I've done my Bible reading. That's not the way the Bible's meant to be read. You're meant to think about it. You're meant to memorize it.

You're meant to chew it through the day and think, what is that talking about? Lord, show me. What are you saying to me? And you're meant to ask yourself questions. What does this show me about God? What does this show me about myself?

If this was explosively true in my life today, how would I live differently today? Give yourself structure.

Don't just read, reflect and then talk about it with others. If you don't understand, ask. There's plenty of people around. You can ask. Ask in your community groups. When you've read something, share it with the people in your groups.

Get a conversation going. And if you're not sure, we have some classes coming up. There's a class starting in the middle of February. We're going to look at how to read the Bible looking through the book of Ephesians.

[42 : 24] It's another great way to get a handle on what the Bible is saying. So when you go and read it by yourself, you can get, oh, this is what it's talking about. And then finally, pray.

Start by asking God to speak to you because he wants to. And finish. Respond to your reading the Bible with prayer. Don't read without responding.

Respond with prayer every day. So are you a starvation case? Are you a snacker? Are you a mouthwash Christian?

Because God wants to make you an active Bible foodie. Reading the Bible requires effort. It requires perseverance. But so does any relationship. But God wants to remake you the way he's

always intended you to be through his word.

Let's pray. Maybe you just think about in my heart of hearts, which of those things do I tend to be more?

[43 : 34] Which of those people do I tend to be? Am I like David who says this is more desirable than gold?

Even fine gold? And maybe now is the time you've got to think about how am I going to respond to what God has said actively with action so that I don't just walk out of the door and become a mouthwash Christian.

But I'm someone who responds to the call that God is speaking to me now. Father, forgive us, forgive me where we sometimes treat your word as if it's an optional extra.

When in fact you want to speak to us through it because you want to change us through it. You want to change this church through it. Lord, our church is going to be only as strong as each of us are in your word, being shaped through the lens of your word.

Please help us to be a community which desires to know you, desires to know your word. Please would you transform us?

[44 : 51] Please would you start us into new habits even as we start in the new year? Would this be something which we chase after with all our hearts? And Father, please, would we know you so much better?

not just as a set of information but as a God who has laid down his life for us that we might know him. Amen.