

God's Word Kept Simple

Are you a Christian who would like to see more impact in your own life from God's Word?

Then great! You've come to the right place.

I still remember those strong desires when I came to Christ at twenty-five. The Spirit unleashed in me a voracious appetite for God's Word, His Love-Letter to me. At the time, I deeply regretted that I had no mentor in my wonderful rural church who could come alongside and show me how to dive down more deeply into such a wonderful revelation from God. I knew His Love-Letter had so much more available for me! I did the best with what I considered my small bundle of study tools.

But I felt inadequate, like I was missing too much. Have you experienced that sinking feeling?

Years later, I realized that God had protected me from the dangers many young Christians fall into who have a similar hunger. Even with the best of motives, my observation is that most of us more mature Christian attempt to pass on to others how to study like us, rather than meeting the other where they are.

*That's why I'm writing **God's Word Kept Simple**.*

Let me begin with your spiritual hunger to know and also to **do** God's Word. There is no LifeChange without putting God's truth into action to encounter our everyday life. From whatever source you receive Biblical truth, *put into practice* as your highest priority. If you do **not**, then note carefully the words of Jesus' half-brother in the first NT book. "*You are self-deceived.*"

DOING God's Word is the single greatest element in transformation.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so **deceive** yourselves. **Do** what it says (James 1:22, **emphasis**).

I also run into young Christians who have a low hunger for God's Word. Jesus gives us the full package when we're saved, including a desire to become *disciples* (which means learners). This also includes the indwelling Master Teacher, the Holy Spirit. He lives within each believer to stir us up to love God's Word, like the psalmist in Psalm 119. The Spirit always initiates as He partners to transform us, and this comes through **doing** God's Word.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:2).

We are either squeezed into the pattern of this world or our minds are transformed by the Spirit. He initiates to set a process in place to renew us through His Word. Notice please. God always *initiates* and we *respond*. Or if you like this verse better in *The Message's* paraphrase.

Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you (Romans 12:2, *The Message*).

So, if you do **NOT** have a strong passion for God's Word, or want to strengthen it, spend a bit of time in these verses from Proverbs below until your heart is warmed. Or read Psalm 119

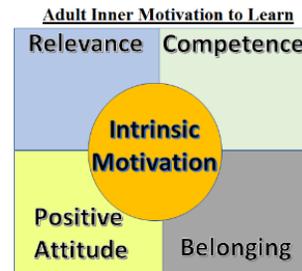
through a number of times. Notice specifically the “*if/then*” statements below. *If* you respond like this, *then* these are the promised results.

My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding—indeed, **if** you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and **if** you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, **then** [He] holds success in store [and] he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless.... **Then** you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.... (Proverbs 2:1-11).

Let’s return to how to engage God’s Word in a way that changes your life, *God’s Word Kept Simple*. *Simple* yet neither simplistic and nor without our effort. Actually, the above was **NOT** a detour. What I shared above encompasses the *simple* culture that’s conducive to LifeChange.

Too many Bible studies stop with digging in to know God’s Word. This is essential preparation but ends up in a cul-de-sac. One recent study of *motivations* toward improved adult learning accurately captures how God designed His people as learners. Jesus calls us *disciples*, learners and *doers* with changing lives.

1. Relevance: *Demonstrating value by relating learning to life.* A desire to find meaning is fundamental to humanity. Adult learners in particular dislike busywork. Adults need to know, “*Why should I learn?*” The incredible resources in the Bible can only be unleashed when its truth encounters life. No intersection with our everyday life and we experience little relevance. However, if we *put* God-Reality into *practice*, we cannot respond very long to God’s Love-Letter and remain unchanged. So, learning *is* relevant when we put truth into action to encounter life. *Therefore*, emphasize *doing* God’s Word.



2. Competence: *Experiencing growing competence in necessary skills and values powerfully motivates learning.* As image-bearers, God created us to co-rule...that is, to have purpose, to explore, perceive, evaluate, think about and change our surroundings to promote positive effects.

Yet how has God designed us to acquire the wisdom to co-rule with Him?

Much of our learning focuses on small bits and pieces of loosely related information. Our minds get bored unless the pieces have a framework to hang it on. Begin with the view from the mountain top, then the valley finds meaning.

First, “*flip*” learning by preparing before group since firsthand preparation stretches our capacity to learn. Learn in a way that aligns with our design by beginning with the first two basic learning skills of *both rapid and repeated* reading. For now, prepare without any outside helps. Give your indwelling personal Teacher, the Holy Spirit, time to teach you personally. This style aligns more with how God designed us to learn. One success cultivates expectancy for continued success so learn in a way to develop growing competence.

3. Belonging: *Connecting with each other accelerates learning.* The relational Trinity (Father, Son and Spirit) *is* the first SmallGroup. So, God fashioned us to connect as social beings. Create a culture in which both the learners and teachers feel respected by and connected to one another. This develops a relaxed, stimulating place to maximize learning. This mutual cooperation with a natural give-&-take releases transforming power in *community* and reflects

God's design. **Therefore**, we learn best together in an interactive community based more on "draw out" with questions than "put in" with directive teaching (although **both** are valid).

*Doing. Flipped learning. Improved learning through **repeated** & **rapid** reading. Community-based learning. **Simple!***

4. Positive Attitude: *Nurturing positive attitudes towards learning.* That leaves one choice... **yours**. Our attitude predisposes us in a certain direction, positively or negatively. As we learn together with a free-flowing give-& take, coming as both learners and teachers, such a learning culture releases joy and fun. When I was rehabbing my hip replacement, I told my physical therapist, "I hate exercise!" I developed a *positive attitude* when I changed my approach by saying (and meaning!): "I like the **results** of exercise." I've been exercising regularly ever since with good results. **Simple**, yet not always easy.

Change our *motives* and our *mindset* about diving into God's Word from **drudgery** to **delight**. Otherwise, we will most likely view this Christian journey as difficult. We will remain on the outside looking in. How sad to forfeit any of the grand treasure God has hidden **for** us in His Word to prepare us to join Him on His epic adventure.

Now, read Proverbs 2:1-11 again and combine its thoughts with these four adult motivations.

1. **Relevance:** The "**if**" statements move us to expend the necessary effort to put God's Word into **practice** to experience that nothing is more relevant. **Doing God's Word**.
2. **Competence:** As we first "**flip**" learning we experience firsthand that the Holy Spirit partners with our efforts. We "master" the Bible (in the sense of getting one book after another under our belt) as we align learning with God's design. Focus on **rapid** reading of larger portions and **repeated** reading of one chapter each day. In time, this holistic approach engages our minds to learn in the way God designed us. We first build the skeleton, so the scattered bits and pieces naturally have a place to land. Our learning capacity expands because we experience the "**then**" statements as motivation.
3. **Belonging:** We choose the mutual give-and-take together in a "family-type" community ("**my son**" eighteen times in first seven chapters).
4. **Positive Attitude:** Approach Scripture with the above three and our attitudes naturally shift to one of expectancy and enjoyment. The Spirit transforms us as His truth encounters our life. In the groups I lead, we all interweave laughter as we enjoy the growth process together.

If you have had a negative view on reading or learning in the past, are you willing to **choose** to change your inner dialog to: "**I enjoy the positive benefits of studying God's Word**"? You are the gatekeeper of your heart.

What if we could break off some of the incomplete ideas about learning from our past and see God's original intent through His eyes?

Several years later, the Spirit of God used a short book by James Gray to open my eyes. Far from "**inadequate**" study skills in my first years, finally I saw from God's perspective, rather than from my own false perspective. God had actually protected from complexity and directed me into what I saw as limitation. This "**simple**" process I "**stumbled**" across in my early years is a natural, powerful way for all of us to learn.

*According to James Gray in "How to Master the English Bible," there are many ways to **study** the Bible. Each is good in its own partial way. There is only one way though to begin to "**master**" a book of the Bible, in the sense of "know key books well."*

This well-educated Bible teacher describes meeting an unschooled layperson at a conference where he spoke. This man demonstrated an extraordinary peace and rest, a joy and a kind of spiritual poise that had eluded Gray to date. So, he asked.

The layman responded, *“I read the book of Ephesians.”* James Gray was surprised because he had read and even preached through Ephesians without the same results. So he asked him to explain the *manner* of his reading. Mr. Gray relates his story.

“He had gone into the country to spend Sunday with his family on one occasion, taking with him a pocket copy of Ephesians, and in the afternoon, going out into the woods and lying down under a tree, he began to read it; he read it; he read it through at a single reading, and finding his interest aroused, read it through again and again. I think he added that he read it some twelve or fifteen times, ‘and when I arose to go into the house,’ said he, ‘I was in possession of Ephesians, or better yet, it was in possession of me; and I had been lifted up to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus in an experimental sense that had not been true in me before, and will never cease to be true in me again.’”

Read that quote one more time please. What does it do to your heart?

Mr. Gray’s heart soared in thanksgiving to God for answered prayer, as mine did many years ago, even though for both of us this plan seemed too *simple*.

*Looking back at my life after reading James Gray, I realized how much “merely” soaking in and **acting** on Scripture had changed me from center to circumference. **All** I knew how to do to study was to **rapidly** read through larger portion of Scripture and **repeatedly** read through chapters.*

I now see this “*layer learning*” approach as God’s norm for learning. By “*layer learning*,” I mean first learn the fundamentals well. Get the view from the mountain peaks before exploring the flora and fauna of the valleys. Our minds hate bits and pieces without a context, so become wearied. From this solid foundation, then build upon it the more complex and nuanced skills and values and perspectives, if necessary.

Where do I begin for simple learning?

I would suggest the New Testament (NT). ***Rapidly*** read the Gospel of John, for instance. Jesus ***is*** Christianity, so saturate your heart with the most compelling person to ever live. If you ***simply*** read one chapter a day, you would be through John in three weeks.

*If you want to dive in more deeply to these three skills, go to my webpage called “**Mining God’s Word**” on my website for more suggestions.*

Wouldn’t you like to develop the spiritual motivation to “*mine*” the boundless treasures in God’s Word. What could it look like to grow a motivation for to ***do*** God’s Word that surpasses the motivation to secure wealth in those minors in 1848 when gold was first discovered at Sutter’s Mill in Coloma, California?

Simple learning!

Happy digging!