

Goals, Guidelines, and Promises for Reading the Bible

*Then you will understand the fear of the LORD
And find the knowledge of God.*

- Proverbs 2.5

Few disciplines could be more important, in these increasingly pluralistic times, than those related to the reading and study of the Bible, the Word of God. As our culture continues to drift from the spiritual moorings to which it was firmly anchored for many generations, the followers of Jesus Christ are not immune to the strong pull and moral undercurrents of relativism. Declining levels of moral and spiritual vitality in the Church suggest that, as a community, we are losing our anchorage in unchanging revealed truth, and have unfurled our sails to uncertain moral winds.

Solomon's advice to his own son concerning how to know wisdom, knowledge, and understanding – a life of integrity and justice; and deliverance from evil, perversion, and darkness is relevant for us today (Prov. 2.1-15). We, too, must avail ourselves with greater determination to the revealed Word of God.

Proverbs 2 recommends two goals, six guidelines, and eight shining promises that come from learning to get more out of our reading and study in the Word of God.

TWO GOALS

First, we need to *focus on the right objectives* for our time in Scripture. Too often, as people read the Bible, they are looking for something to speak directly to some need or interest in their own lives. They want the Bible to provide comfort, direction, doctrinal insight, or satisfaction of some immediate, personal concern. And while the Scriptures are certainly profitable for these and all manner of good things, this is not their primary purpose. Unless we learn to read the Bible with its primary purpose in mind, we will miss the main point of why God has chosen to speak with us through His Word.

The primary end for which God has given us His Word is that *we might learn to fear Him* (v. 5). “Fearing God” is decidedly not “in” among Christians these days. Contemporary preaching has encouraged a much more casual, friendly, and comforting view of God than what the Scriptures encourage. Solomon knew that his wayward-tending son would not walk the path of righteousness unless he first learned to fear the Lord. And he also knew that God had given His Word to His servants, the prophets, in order that they might teach the people of Israel to do precisely that.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Ps. 111.10) and all knowledge (Prov. 1.7). The fear of the Lord is hating evil (Prov. 8.13). The fear of the Lord is clean (Ps. 19.9), life giving (Prov. 10.27), strong (Prov. 14.26), and a means of escaping the snares of sin (Prov. 14.27). The fear of the Lord is completely satisfying, creating contentment and freedom from covetous ways (Prov. 15.16, 19.23). To fear the Lord is to hope in His steadfast love (Ps. 33.18). The fear of the Lord is the normal condition for the followers of Christ to pursue in their daily lives (Acts 9.31).

No wonder understanding the fear of the Lord is the primary reason God has spoken to us in His Word! Begin reading the Bible with a desire to learn the fear of the Lord, and you will undoubtedly begin to hear His voice more clearly.

The second objective for our reading and study of Scripture must be to *find the knowledge of God*. *Knowing* God means living daily, ever more deeply, in the fullness of eternal life (Jn. 17.3). To know the Lord is to encounter Him in His glory (2 Cor. 3.7-18). It is to participate in Him, through the promises He has given us in His Word (2 Pet. 1.4). To know the Lord is to be transformed into His very image, by becoming more like

Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18). Thus, our objective in reading and studying the Bible must be the same as the reason for which God has given us His Word— that we might *know* Him, *commune* with Him, and *become like* Him in every aspect of our being. Begin taking this as your objective in the reading and study of God’s Word, and you are likely to find the Spirit of God much more active in making the Bible clear, compelling, and life-changing.

SEVEN GUIDELINES

But how to pursue those twin objectives of fearing and knowing the Lord? Solomon gives us six guidelines in Proverbs 2, which we can perhaps summarize here:

Receive the Word (v.1). We can’t gain any benefit from the Bible if we’re not willing to devote the time necessary to reading, meditating on, and studying, line upon line, precept upon precept, all that God has written in His whole counsel. To receive the Word we must go to it, open it faithfully and attentively, and give it the time it demands and requires.

Treasure the Word (v. 1). You’ll be treasuring the Word, delighting in it enthusiastically, when you find yourself meditating on it, talking excitedly about it, looking forward eagerly to every moment you can invest in it, and sharing it generously with everyone you can.

Heed the Word (v. 2). It’s not enough to read and meditate. We must practice what we are reading, or our time in the Word will be of no value (Jms.2.22-25).

Love the Word (v. 2). Solomon says, “incline your heart” to the commandments of the Lord. He means, learn to focus all your strongest, most positive affections—love, longing, hope, trust, desire, aspiration, determination—on what God is revealing about Himself and His will in Scripture. Learn to love *all* the Word, regularly working your way through both Testaments, eager to learn the fear and knowledge of the Lord.

Pray over the Word (v. 3). Cry out to God in prayer as you read and study. Plead with Him for understanding. Make your time in the Word a time of dialog and conversation in which, as God speaks to you, you speak back to Him, seeking clarification and strength to obey.

Persevere in the Word (v. 4). Dig away at it like buried treasure. Hunt for its wisdom and understanding with determination. Pore over it day by day. Make it your occupation to persevere in the Scripture so that it begins to master every area of your life.

Bring these guidelines into your practice of reading and studying the Word, in the light of the objectives of fearing and knowing the Lord, and you’ll find your time in Scripture much more satisfying and rewarding.

EIGHT PROMISES

Even more than that, Solomon makes eight amazing promises for those who approach the Word of God in the way he recommends:

You will understand righteousness (v. 9). No more confusion about moral issues, only clear-headed, divinely-inspired insight and guidance.

You will understand justice (v. 9). Watch as God develops in you a growing sense of how you can contribute to a more loving and just society.

You will know equity (v. 9). How to love others in ways appropriate to their needs.

You will know every good path (v. 9). The Scriptures enable us to discern right from wrong.

Wisdom will enter your heart (v. 10). You'll be sound from the inside-out, motivated and able to live wisely before God and men.

Knowledge will be pleasant to your soul (v. 10). Find learning a drudge? Here's the cure for that.

Discretion will watch over you and understanding will guard you (v. 11). No more getting blindsided by hasty decisions, unguarded words, or unwise, unkind responses.

Deliverance from the way of evil (v. 12). That's right—we don't have to sin, as Paul reminds us (Rom. 6.12-18). The Word of God—the perfect Law of liberty (Jms. 2.22-25) can set us free from our natural tendencies to sin and liberate us to live in love for God and others.

Who of us would not like to see more evidence of these bright promises radiating from our lives? The way to know these promises is clear: search the Scriptures for the fear of the Lord, following the guidelines Solomon outlined for his son. Set a course to begin getting more out of the Word of God. He has put so much more in the Scriptures than any of us could ever possibly plumb. And He invites us to search the Scriptures daily (Acts 17.11), to desire them more than our necessary food (Job 23.12), to feed on them as of first importance ([Jeremiah 15.16](#)), and to study them so that our lives may prove the truth of what they teach (2 Tim. 2.15). Could your Scripture disciplines use a tune-up? Let Solomon guide you into a new and more exciting adventure of living and growing in God's Word.