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Lesson 20

Application

A reporter was interviewing renowned psychiatrist about the subject of prison reform. After the interview, the doctor handed this reporter a book that he had written on the subject; upon which the reporter politely promised to read it.

“No you won’t,” the doctor told him! Besides, what would you do about it, even if you did?

And that’s the exact same situation we have here when it comes to Bible study. People are given the opportunity to learn how to study the Bible, but they don’t take advantage of it. And like the doctor said, even if they did take advantage of it, what good would it do?

Well, that’s a good question. Even if you do decide to read and study God’s Word faithfully, what difference will you allow it to make in your life?

And that said, this third and final step in Bible study, which is application, although it’s the most needed stage in the process; it’s also the most neglected. Because even if people do choose to study their Bible, many won’t choose to apply it to their everyday lives. And the result will be no change.

And the truth is, most Bible study begins with interpretation, and then ends with interpretation. And many times that interpretation will be wrong

or at least partially wrong. And even if it's right on, it's useless without the final step of application.

So we don't start and end with the question, what does this mean?

We start with the question, What do I see? In order, to answer the question what does it say? So then we can proceed to ask and answer the question, what does it mean?

But then we don't stop there; we keep going. And after we determine what a passage of scripture really means, then we ask the question; how does it work? And more specifically, how does it work to transform my life?

And so the ultimate goal of Bible study, is not to do something to the Bible, but to allow the Bible to do something to you, so that the truth of God's word might make a real difference in your life.

And so to study the word of God is a good thing, and to preach and teach it is a good thing, but all those good things must be done with the intention of transformation.

Somebody was bragging to Dr, Kendricks who is the writer of this textbook we're studying; that they had been through the Bible twelve times. He said, that's wonderful, but how many times has the Bible been through you?

And so the goal of Bible study is not only to get into the Word of God, but to let the Word of God get into us, so it can make a permanent difference in our character and conduct.

And so this final step is sometimes very convicting, which is why a lot of people want to bypass it or substitute other things for it.

And so I want you give you five things to look out for; five cautions if you will that people tend to substitute for the step of application.

And the first one is one I just mentioned; interpretation. Many people are quick to settle for knowledge rather than experience. But according to the Bible itself, to know and not to do is not to know at all.

Most of us have heard of where horrific crimes were committed and people had witnessed those crimes but never came forward with that information or refused to testify against those who had perpetrated the crime.

Well, I think we'd all agree, that that's a tragedy when people don't think knowledge creates responsibility!

But yet people everyday do the same thing when it comes to the word of God. They receive the knowledge whether it be through their own personal Bible study or through the teaching of others or through the preaching of their pastor, but they never use that knowledge to change anything. In other words, they somehow think they're not responsible for the knowledge they gain.

But that's not what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches that the moment you know God's truth, the ball is in your court; and you're responsible to put that knowledge it into action.

That's why Jesus said in **Matthew 13:12, For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.**

And in Luke 6:46, "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"

In other words, either stop calling me "Lord," or start doing what I tell you.

On another occasion, in **Matthew 7:22, Jesus said, 22 Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in**

Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ 23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’

Jesus never denied that they had done all those things but still He rejects them! Why?

Well, it wasn't because He didn't know them with His mind. Jesus knows all things; and so He wasn't talking about the physical, He was talking about the spiritual. In other words, He didn't have a personal relationship with them.

And of course the classic illustration of interpretation without application is the scribes and Pharisees. These religious leaders had all kinds of knowledge. They had mastered the scriptures, but they had never been changed by it.

For instance, Did they know where the Messiah was to be born? Absolutely! They were authorities on that: They knew that Bethlehem of Judea, would be the place, but when the report came that he was being born there, did they go down to check it out?

No, they didn't go. Even though the town was only a few miles down the road, they never went to see for themselves.

In other words, their knowledge created no responsibility whatsoever within them. That's why Jesus said what he said in **Matthew 5:20**, **“Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom.”**

Why? Because all of their righteousness was external. It was all based on facts, but it never led to a personal response.

James 4:17: “Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins”.

So a person who knows the truth, but doesn't act on it, is not just making a mistake—or making a poor judgment—he is in sin. Because in God's mind, knowledge without obedience is sin.

And so the first danger is to substitute interpretation for application.

And then the second danger is to substitute superficial obedience for genuine life-change or true transformation.

And this is probably more common than the problem we just looked at. This where a person applies the biblical truth they learn to areas where they're already applying it, not to new areas where they need to apply it.

And the result of course: will be no noticeable change in that person's lives.

For example, say a man in the business world comes across **Ephesians 4:25, which says, “Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.”**

That's pretty clear. It's dealing with the issue of honesty: So what does he do? Well, he thinks of all the areas where he's already honest. For instance, he thinks about how he's being honest with his wife; he wouldn't think of lying to his wife. And then he thinks about how he's honest with his children and how he always shoots straight with his children; and how they can always count on Dad to tell them the truth. And then he thinks about how he's always honest with his coworkers; and how people at work always trust him.

And so when he reads Ephesians 4:25, he thinks of all of these areas where he's already obeying that truth, and then he pats himself on the back.

But he overlooks the fact that he's not totally honest on his tax return, or on his expense account, or on his tithe check or whatever. He never even considers those areas when he studies this scripture.

Why?

Because if he did, he'd have to change; right?

And then a third danger is when we substitute rationalization for repentance.

In other words, when we do evaluate our lives in light of the truth and become convicted, we start to defend ourselves. And our favorite strategy is most times to rationalize our sin; instead of repenting of it.

For instance, when it comes to one's taxes, somebody might evaluate their actions in light of the truth of Ephesians 4:25 and become convicted.

But instead of repenting and turning from that sin, they rationalize their sin. They say something like, Well, everybody else does it, or if I pay my taxes correctly the government's just going to turn around and waste it or give it to somebody that doesn't deserve it. And though those things may be true, it's still a sin to not pay what you owe on your taxes.

Another danger is to substitute an emotional experience for an intentional decision. In other words, to be moved emotionally by the truth of God's word, whether it be through tears or sorrow or regret or whatever, but to never be moved to the point of making a real change in our life.

If our only response is water down our handkerchiefs and come to an altar and say a few shallow prayers, and then go merrily on our way without ever altering our behavior, then our relationship to the Lord Jesus is nothing more than that shallow prayer we just prayed.

It's kind of like what most preachers get after the service every Sunday. People come and shake our hand and tell us what a wonderful sermon we preached, but nothing ever changes.

They go home and they never think not one thought of what you preached or how it should affect their life or the way they should live. It's just information in and nothing out. And though the truth may touch them emotionally from time to time, it never touches them to the point of transformation.

And then lastly there's the danger of substituting communication for transformation.

In other words, we hear the truth or study the truth and as a result we talk the talk, but we don't walk the walk. And we think that if we can speak eloquently or convincingly about a point of Scripture, then we're somehow covered. We're off the hook. We think because we've convinced others that we know what we're talking about that that's somehow a substitution for living that truth.

And though we might fool others, God is not fooled. He knows our hearts. And even more importantly, He knows our true behavior.

That's why He told Samuel in **1 Samuel 16:7**, **"God sees not as man sees, for man looks at [and listens to] the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at [and listens to] the heart"**.

Likewise, the writer to the **Hebrews in chapter 4:13**, says, **And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.**

King David learned that truth the hard way. Remember how he violated Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, then when she became pregnant with his

child, he arranged to have Uriah killed in battle. Afterwards, he covered up his sins and carried on as if nothing had happened.

Then one day the prophet Nathan paid David a visit. Remember that in Old Testament times, prophets spoke for God. So in effect, Nathan represented the Word of God.

And then Nathan told David a story about a rich and powerful man who had stolen a poor man's only possession. He had stolen his one and only lamb—in order to feed a guest. Well, when David heard about this injustice, he became very angry: **“And he said, Just as the Lord lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die. And he must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion” That's in 2 Samuel 12:5–6.**

Now, just imagine if you had been standing there, listening to David make that speech. You'd probably have thought, “Wow, that King David is really standing up for this poor man. He's really a champion for righteousness. What a great man he is! No wonder God calls him a man after His own heart.” And no doubt David's words were very compelling.

But God has never been or will ever be impressed with our words alone. “The Lord looks at the heart.” “And nothing ... is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare.”

That's why Nathan looked King David in the eyes and cut him to the quick when he told David, “You're the man in this story!” You're the one who stole the poor man's lamb, but even worse!

And that's what the Word of God will do to you and me—if we let it. It will cut you to the quick.

Hebrews 4:12 says, For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even

to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

And friend, that's the level where real transformation takes place. But it'll never take place at all if we try and substitute our communication for our transformation. In tother words, if we hide behind our speech, in order to evade that piercing, then we'll never change.

And so what do we need to do?

Well, first we need to take a good long look in the mirror. Every one of us needs to take a good long look in the mirror.

James 1:21 Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

26 If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. 27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

The apostle James in essence is asking a very penetrating question. He's asking does the Word of God really work?

And the answer is yes, it does work if it is received. **Verse 21 says, if we receive with meekness the implanted word.**

Now, that word he uses in the Greek for ‘receive’. It actually means to put out a welcome mat. In other words, to welcome the truth into your life. To invite God’s word into the door of your heart and your mind and your soul and then let it do its work on you. Do you welcome God’s word?

You see, when we leave church on Sunday morning, the issue ought not be; what did the preacher say? It ought to be; what are we going to do as a result of what he said?

So often we hear a sermon or go to a Bible study and we hear a lesson or a truth from the Bible that is very convicting—yet what do we do? We walk away and say, “When’s the next Bible study?”

But James says, “Look, you’ve got to embrace biblical truth. You’ve got to invite that truth into your life or it’s all for naught”.

And then he offers us an interesting illustration to make that point. He points to the mirror that many people stand in front of everyday to see what we can do to better the image we’re staring at.

We look in the mirror and if we have hair and it’s all messed up, we think I’ve got to do something about that. And so we comb our hair or we brush it or we wash it and dry it. In other words, we do something to change what we see.

But James is talking about a person who does just the opposite. This guy looks in the mirror and he says, “What a mess! “I need to wash my face. I need to shave. I need to comb my hair.” But after noticing all of that, he just walks away and does none of those things.

He goes to work and his boss comes up to him and says, “What’s with you today? Was your water off this morning? Did you lose your razor and your comb? What’s the deal?”

You say, No my water was just fine, and I had brand new razor and a comb. I just didn’t use them!

Well, that’s the type of person James is talking about. He opens his Bible and he reads and maybe even studies the Word of God, but he’s not changed by it. He just looks in the mirror and he sees the mess but then he just closes the book and never does anything about it.

But then James says, it doesn’t have to be that way. There is an alternative. **Verse 25 says, “But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer, but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does”.**

And so the question becomes; do we want the blessing of God? Or do we want to remain as we are, by just going through the motions, but with no real change?

Well, if your desire is to truly be changed by God’s word, then do your best to not miss next week. Because I’m going to give you four ways to do just that.