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The Mission
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Lesson 21

Last week we delved into our last step when it comes to learning how to study the Bible which is? Application!

And we talked about and emphasized how foolish it is to come to the word of God and whether we hear it or study it or meditate on it as we should, to turn around and leave without ever considering how it applies to our lives and the way we live.

And I pointed you to the Book of James which we've studied together in the past, and specifically to chapter one beginning with verse 22 which says.

James 1:22, 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.

So in essence a lot of Christians are like poor photographs—overexposed and underdeveloped. In other words, they've had plenty of exposure to the light of God's Word, but what difference really has it made in their lives?

And the problem is not with Scripture. Like we've learned in the previous lessons, there is power in the word of God to transform us. But we have to be willing to humble ourselves and admit that we need to change; and then we have to make a commitment to change. But therein lies our problem: the human heart naturally resists change. And there's nothing in this world that it despises anymore than change. And most people, if not all people will avoid it at all costs. And sometimes that cost can be very great. Up to and including the loss of one's soul.

And so in this chapter I want to show you a way to avoid that tendency. And I want to give you four steps to perform when you come to this last phase or step in studying your Bible.

And so the first step to application is simply to know.

If you really want to apply the Bible, then you need to know two things.

First you need to know the text.

In a previous lesson, we learned that we have to take certain steps, in a certain order, to guarantee a certain result. Not just any steps; not just any order; and not just any result.

And by now, hopefully you know these three steps. They are again: observation, interpretation, application. And now we're considering the step of application, which is where life-change occurs.

But as we move forward, we need to remember that the order of these steps is crucial. And it's crucial because prior to applying the Word of God, you've got to know what the Scripture is teaching. And you can only gain that knowledge by first being diligent in your observations, and then by being very careful in the interpretation. And only when you've finished these first two steps are you in a position to act on what you know.

And so you need to know the text.

Secondly you need to know yourself.

In **1 Timothy 4:16**, Paul warns young Timothy. He says,

16 Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

In other words, “Pay very close attention to yourself and to your teaching.”

And again, the order is critical: pay attention to yourself, first, Paul tells Timothy. And then pay attention to the communication of biblical truth to others. Why? Because if you don’t know yourself, it’s difficult to help other people apply the Bible to their lives.

In fact, one of the main reasons application’s not more effective with more people is, because they really don’t know themselves.

Now, to do that we need to ask ourselves a few questions. **First, What are your assets?** What have you got going for you? If you could you write down your three greatest assets right now, what would they be? Think about that for minute.

Second, What are your liabilities? Or maybe a better way to put it; what are your limitations? Or what is the greatest hindrance to your spiritual growth?

Now, when you combine those two answers, you ought to be able to see the value in application. Because if you know your assets, it’ll develop your confidence. And if you know your liabilities or your limitations, it’ll develop your faith. Your assets tell you what God’s done for you. Your liabilities tell you what God needs to develop in you. And the reason most of us don’t grow more is because we really don’t know what we need.

Romans 12:3 is a good verse to describe what I'm talking about. The NIV says, **“For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you”**

Most times, I think most of us tend to think a lot more highly of ourselves than we should. And sometimes our opinion of ourselves and others is distorted. And so Paul says, “Don't get all puffed up about who you are. But make sure you don't dump on yourself, either.”

Because every time you dump on yourself, you're just doing the devil's work for him—and believe me, he doesn't need your help. He specializes in that.

And so to know the text and to know yourself is going to be the first step toward spiritual growth—and toward applying the scriptures to your life.

The second step to application is to relate.

Once we know the truth of the Word, we need to relate it to our own experience.

In fact, Christianity, I think is best understood as a series of new relationships.

Remember 2 Corinthians 5:17? We've heard that verse around here a few times. If we're “in Christ,” we're “new creatures.” In other words, we're in the same body, but we're undergoing a transformation. And by a miracle of God, He takes the “old us” and makes a “new us.” And new things start happening in our heart and in our life, because Christ has moved into our life.

And not just anywhere in our life, but to the center of our life. He becomes the center of everything and once He's there in the center, He affects every area of our being. He changes the way we think and He gives us new desires and as He goes to work in our home life: we start to become better partners to our spouse, and better parents to our children, and we become a person overall. He strengthens our thought life: so our mind begins to dwell on things that are constructive instead of things that are destructive, and slowly but surely we begin to cultivate more godly values.

He also renovates our social life: our relationships with old friends begin to diminish as He brings new friends into our life; people who will help us to love God rather than fall back into sin.

And whether be in business or at school or at work or at home, Jesus wants to renew every area of life. That's why we say that Christian growth is a process—and that we're a work in progress even until the day the Lord takes us home.

And so every day we need to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit as He shows us areas of our life over which the Lord does not have full control.

That's why it's so important and so critical that we keep coming to the Word of God on a regular basis. Our spiritual growth is never over. It's a long-term process that will continue until Jesus comes to us or we go to Him.

Now, once you realize that Jesus Christ wants to impact your life in such a profound way, then you need to look for areas where you can relate the Word of God to your life.

Such as your relationship to God. God's your heavenly Father, which means now you have a personal and very intimate relationship with Him. And He's not only provided His Son for your salvation; He's also given

you the Holy Spirit to help you grow and accomplish the purposes He has planned out for your life.

And then there's the new **relationship you have to yourself**. Hopefully you have a new self-image. If God loves you, if Christ died for you, if the Holy Spirit has gifted and empowered you, then that means you have a tremendous value and significance. And because of that your life should at least take on a new meaning and purpose.

And then there's your new **relationship to other people**. Hopefully you've discovered that other people, and I'm talking about other Christian people, hopefully you understand they're not your enemy. They may be victims of the enemy just like you, but they're not your enemy! They're just people that God has placed in your life to help you through this life; and He's placed you in their life, to help them through.

And then lastly you now have a new **relationship to the enemy**. You see, once you come to Christ, you change sides. You're still in the battle; you're just on the other side now.

Before, you were just a pawn of the enemy. And whether you realized it or not, he was just moving you around wherever he wanted you to go. And you never even knew that you were being played.

But now you're on God's side. And trust me, the devil's not the least bit happy about that. And that's why your Christian life will always remain a battle. He'll never quit trying to destroy you!

That's why it's so important to stay in God's word; so you can take what you learn and apply it to all these new relationships you now have.

Now, let me show you how all that takes place.

First, the Word exposes your sin. 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that Scripture has a reproving and corrective function. In other words, it'll tell

you when you are out-of-bounds or in order to clean out the sin from your life.

Second the Word gives you God's promises. It tells you what you can expect from God and what you can rely on Him to do. And that's encouraging and comforting when you face circumstances that are beyond you.

Third the Word gives you God's commands. Just as there are promises in Scripture, so there are conditions to be met. And there are commands and principles in the word of God that are intended to lead you toward health and life.

And then lastly the Word gives you examples to follow. The Bible is just full of stories of people who lived out their lives before God. And some of those people offer us a positive example, while others offer us a negative example or poor example to follow. And of course, those are the ones we need to avoid.

And so when you take all those things and put them together; the word of God will show us what's right, what's not right, how to get right and how to stay right.

And then the third step to application is to meditate.

You know before the age of cell phones and smart tv's and computers and a hectic schedule, folks used to spend a lot of time just sitting on the front porch and day dreaming or just resting their mind. But that doesn't happen much anymore. People are rushing from here to there and when they are home, they're either in the kitchen or on their cell phone or watching tv or on their computer and there just no such thing as down time anymore where you don't do anything but think about things.

And that's why so many people nowadays are on pills to calm their nerves or on medicine to deal with the depression their hectic lifestyle causes. And so this step of meditation has some health benefits as well as some spiritual benefits.

Now, if I were to give you a definition for meditation; I would say it's pondering the truth with a view to letting it help and readjust your life. And just like it benefited our forefathers, it's still has relevance today.

Now, we've already seen in past lessons that meditation is useful in the step of Observation. And it's absolutely essential in the step of Application.

Remember Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1:1–2? Both of those passages say that the key to spiritual prosperity is to meditate on the Word of God both day and night. In other words, everyday we ought to keep the Scriptures at the forefront of our lives .

Trish made beef stew for supper tonight. She started early this morning putting it all together, and then she put it in the slow cooker and cooked it all day until all those ingredients came together to make for a good stew.

Now, that stew couldn't have happened in a few minutes. She couldn't have gone into the kitchen and threw all those ingredients in a pot and turned it up on high and 15 minutes later had a good tasting stew. It took all day in fact for that to happen.

And that's what it means to meditate on the word. You can't open your Bible and read a few verses and then close it and go on your merry way back into this rat race we call life and expect to get a good tasting stew out of your time.

What you receive from the word of God is in direct relationship to the amount of time you're willing to spend thinking about it.

You say, but I have a hard time thinking,

Well, that's because you never take the time to do it. And you're starving your brain of the fuel that's required to help you think, which is time.

And by the way, there's a direct link between meditation and memory and time. Memorization can only come by spending time in God's word.

Now, you may not place a very high value on memorizing scripture, and you may never find yourself in a situation where you really need it, but you might. There may come a time in your life and you're in a desperate situation and the only means you have to the word of God is to recall what you've memorized. If so, how much of the Bible would that entail?

In fact, if somebody were to ask you to quote your favorite verse, what verse would you quote? Or if someone were to ask you how to be saved at a moment's notice, could you lead them down the Roman's Road to Christ? Could you quote enough verses from the Bible to tell somebody else how to be saved?

There's power in word. But you have to know the word to unleash that power.

So those are things we need to think about. And there's never a convenient time to start. We just have to make up our mind to do it and then do it. And also it's never too late to start either.

And then step 4 is to practice.

And that's the ultimate goal of Bible study; to practice the truth that we learn. Scripture wasn't written to fatten up hogs; it was written to train athletes and to equip soldiers for the realities of life. "Run to win." "Fight to win." That's the message of the Word.

It may not be possible to consciously apply every truth you find in your study of scripture, but you ought to be able to consistently apply something.

So you always want to ask yourself, Is there some area of my life for which this truth is needed?

And one way to answer that question is like we've said before; to examine ourselves; to take a spiritual inventory. That means to prayerfully reflect on your true condition in the various areas of your life. And then ask God to put His finger on a place where you know you need to apply the truth you're gleaning from His Word. And then, by faith and in obedience, begin acting on that truth in whatever way seems best for the area in which you need to grow.

I can assure you, your hunger for that Word will be in direct proportion to your obedience to it. In fact, there's a cycle: The more you understand it, the more you use it; and the more you use it, the more you'll want to understand it. And both are necessary.

In the end, you'll always find two sides to Christian living: you need food, and you need exercise. Too much food just leads to obesity. Too little food develops anemia. But food is transformed into energy, and energy enables you to do that which God wants you to do.

But in the process, eventually you become tired and weary and many times you lose your perspective. And that's why you have to constantly come back to the Word of God to be refueled and refreshed.

And remember this; the Word of God experienced is the Word of God enjoyed. Amen?