

CULTIVATING
A LOVE FOR
GOD'S WORD



MICHAEL KELLEY

LifeWay

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Chapter 1	6
<i>The Two Pillars of a Love for God's Word</i>	
<i>Chapter 2</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>The Three Principles for Pursuing a Love for God's Word</i>	
<i>Chapter 3</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Implementing Consistency</i>	
<i>Chapter 4</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Implementing Intentionality</i>	
<i>Chapter 5</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Implementing Simplicity</i>	
Conclusion	28

INTRODUCTION

God has not left us without a word.

Imagine, for a moment, what life would be like without a word. Imagine walking into a new school without a class schedule, a map, or an idea where the cafeteria is located. Imagine starting a new job when your manager didn't fully explain the expectations of the role, or how you can be successful, or that on Fridays everyone dresses down in the office. Imagine moving to a new city and having no one to tell you which part of town to live in, where to buy groceries, or where the closest park is. Imagine life without a word, and now imagine life without a word from God.

It's aimless. Purposeless. Directionless. And very, very lonely. But God has not left us without a word:

"Long ago God spoke to the fathers by the prophets at different times and in different ways. In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. God has appointed him heir of all things and made the universe through him" (Hebrews 1:1-2).

We do not serve a voiceless, nameless God, but One who communicates with His people. And thank goodness He does.

We have a Word from the Lord. It is His revelation of Himself; it is the truth of the universe; it is the answer for why we are here, and where we are going. And for most of the people in the churches we serve, several copies of it are sitting in their homes. Indeed, God has given us a Word.

Because God has given us a word, we have a responsibility to listen.

So many Christians ask the question about God's will for their lives, paralyzed by a decision in front of them and all the time wishing God would tell them what to do about this or that. Even though in the

moment those seem like gargantuan decisions, they are only a small part of life. We may spend about 10 percent of our decision capacity on things like these. That leaves 90 percent. And most of that is in regard to general areas of life—and God has plenty to say about that. He has said much about relationships, priorities, money, marriage, parenting—you name it. But we get so fixated on the 10 percent that we fool ourselves into thinking God hasn't spoken at all. He has, but we often aren't putting ourselves in a posture to listen.

We listen by doing the same old things we have always done—we read the Bible, we pray, we meditate, then we act on what we hear. Simply put, we don't have much room to cry about what God isn't saying if we aren't listening to what He is saying. Furthermore...

Because God has given us a word, we don't need to look for another one.

One of the early heresies that permeated the church was something called Gnosticism. Though it has many forms, much of it centers around the idea of having some kind of secret knowledge that's only available to a select few. As we look around the evangelical world today, perhaps Gnosticism is still out there, just wearing a different set of clothes:

- Thinking we have discovered something new that no one else has ever discovered about God before.
- Looking for "deep" things outside the revelation of God.
- Having a sense of superiority because of some kind of unique relationship with God.

All of these traits and more stem from a disbelief in God's revelation of Himself. In each case, we are searching for some kind of ever-elusive "else" that manifests itself into looking further and further outward when we should be looking further and further inward. Again, simply put, God has given us a Word. And He is not going to contradict Himself.

What we need most as church leaders, but even more as Christians, is not just to know this Word God has given us—but to love this Word God has given us. To value it. To treasure it. And to lovingly accept it.

How can we, as church leaders, cultivate a love for God's Word in our churches? Specifically, how can we cultivate that love in three main areas of our congregational life—in families, in our groups, and in the congregation as a whole? That's what this small primer is about. It's an attempt to give some practical and achievable principles for creating an environment in which God's Word is not only read and taught, but is actually loved.

CHAPTER 1: THE TWO PILLARS OF A LOVE FOR GOD'S WORD

As we seek to create the kind of environment in which God's Word is loved, we must begin with two truths. These are two key things that must be taught, believed, and modeled if we are to help people love the Word of God.

God's Word is true.

This is a simple statement, but there is immense power in that simplicity. When it comes to matters of faith, this conviction simplifies everything else. It's one decision of faith that brings into perspective all other decisions of faith. It is, in fact, the central point of decision for moving forward with Jesus. And you can settle it by asking one simple question:

Is the Bible true?

Once you make that decision, then everything else comes into focus. Once you decide the Bible is true, then you can know who God is. And once you decide the Bible is true, then you can know who you are. You can know how to make decisions, know why you exist on this planet, know the purpose of your family, and everything else. Further, you can always boil any decision back to that central decision:

Is the Bible true?

If what we believe about the Word of God is indeed so central, so pivotal, then it's no wonder it was the word of God that Satan attacked at the very beginning, for it was the word of God Satan attacked in the middle of the garden in Genesis 3:

"Did God really say...?" the serpent said to the woman.

Those four words still haunt us today. They haunt us not only because of the devastating effects that came afterward, but because those same four words are at the core of every temptation, social evil, and moral compromise we still face:

- *"Did God really say not to worry?"*
- *"Did God really say He would provide for you?"*
- *"Did God really say judgment would come to all people?"*

And we can take it further:

- *"Did God really say He made humans male and female?"*
- *"Did God really say all life is precious, even in the womb?"*
- *"Did God really say Jesus is the only way to the Father?"*

Here is the conviction that shapes all other convictions. Once we are firm in believing the truth of God's Word, then we are firm in believing all other things that derive from this decision trickle down to every detail of our lives. If God has indeed spoken, then we are not without a Word. And it's our conviction in that Word that shapes everything else.

Our hearts follow our investments.

We desire that men, women, and children not just read the Bible, but also that they love the Bible. The problem is that you can't manufacture *love* even in your own heart, much less in the hearts of the people of your church. That's why this truth is so valuable because even though you can't manufacture love, you can control your focus and priority. And our hearts will follow our investments:

"Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don't break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:19-21).

It's a pretty familiar passage, one you could summarize like this: Follow the money. If you want to know what you really value, what you really

love, what you really treasure, then follow the money. Your bank account will reveal the true desire of your heart.

That is true—our resource investment is revelatory. It's a signpost to show us, regardless of what we say, what we truly love. But we can read Matthew 6 in another way that has less to do with *revealing* our hearts, and more to do with *directing* them.

Look back at the passage. Jesus is giving direction to His followers. He's saying "don't store up" and then instead "store up." These are active commands, things for us to do no matter how we feel. We can certainly identify with that because we do things we don't necessarily feel like doing all the time. We get up and exercise, not because we are excited to do it, but because we know it's good for us and we will be glad we did.

Now trace that line out a little further. When Jesus tells us, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also," it can be read as an action point. Here we find what to do with our apathy. Let's look at it through the lens of an example.

Let's say you have a neighbor that is difficult to be around. He's reclusive, stoic, and unfriendly to you and your family. And you feel very apathetic toward him. In fact, you wish he would just move. But you know you shouldn't feel that way. You know you should feel compassion and love and generosity toward him. So what do you do with your apathy?

You invest some resources in that relationship, because your heart will follow your investment. When you give yourself to something, you will begin to care about it. So you invest some time in purposefully trying to have a conversation when you're both outside. You invest some sweat in offering to help him cut his grass or trim his bushes. You invest some emotion by inviting him over for a BBQ. And slowly, you find that where your treasure is, your heart is beginning to be also.

Here, then, are two pillars of truth to build upon in order to cultivate a love for God's Word:

1. God's Word is true, and
2. Our hearts follow our investments.

Those truths lead us to three principles we can thread throughout the strategy and resources we provide to families, groups, and the congregation as a whole.

CHAPTER 2: THE THREE PRINCIPLES FOR PURSUING A LOVE FOR GOD'S WORD

Principle #1: Consistency

Imagine a leaky faucet. Regardless of how hard you twist the knob, it still drips. One drop at a time. Incessantly—drip, drip, drip. The consistency becomes an annoyance pretty quickly. But placed in the right environment and given enough time, that same dripping with that same consistency can have an immense amount of power.

Consistency is how canyons are made. Not all at once, but through the power of repetition. Dripping isn't that exciting, but what it lacks in flash it makes up for in effectiveness. When it comes to cultivating a love for God's Word, nothing replaces the principle of consistency.

The first truth—that God's Word is true—is enough to drive us to the principle of consistency. We live in a confusing world with complicated issues. We often don't know how we should think or feel about what confronts us on a given day. To complicate matters, our hearts are divided in our sin. We can't trust ourselves to think rightly, believe rightly, or act rightly. We need a source of truth outside ourselves to help us define reality and therefore live in a wise way. When we recognize God's Word as this source of truth, we are compelled to consistently read it.

While we might be compelled to read God's Word consistently because it is true, it's the second truth that will move us beyond just reading God's Word to loving God's Word. Again, here is an example to help flesh this out:

Every parent tells their children to eat their vegetables. And hopefully, parents consistently require their children to eat the vegetables. Why

should they do this? It's not because children love vegetables; it's because the parents know that eating vegetables is the best thing for them. But over time, as they consistently eat those vegetables, they develop a taste for them. Even a love for them. That comes through the power of repeated action over and over again.

If we want to see a love for God's Word in families, groups, and entire congregations, then we must emphasize the principle of consistency—of reading and studying God's Word not because we always want to, but because it's the best thing for us and we want to want to.

Principle #2: Intentionality

Imagine you're on a boat in the middle of the lake. The day is perfect—not too hot, and no wind whatsoever. Because of the lack of wind, the water has no ripples on it. Not a stirring. It looks like a pane of glass below you. Completely calm. Totally placid.

So you jump in and swim for a while. But when you return to the exact spot where you left the boat, you find that it has moved. Maybe not much, but it has moved nonetheless. How can that be? There's no wind. And consequently no waves. Still no disturbances on the water. Yet the boat has moved. It has *drifted*.

Even though the surface of the water looks completely calm, currents still flow below the surface. They might be slight—not even noticeable if you are in the water—but they're there. Because of these currents, the boat will always drift. Slowly, sure—but drift nonetheless.

Our hearts are like that. Everything might look calm on the surface. We might not be facing a major crisis, no undue amounts of stress; secure in our health and career, no pressing doubts or questions about God and His work in the world. And yet, there is always an undercurrent of sin in our hearts. That means if we aren't acting to prevent it, we will always drift. And the drift is often slow. Barely even noticeable. But it's there.

We see this dynamic at play in Psalm 1:1:

*How happy is the one who does not
walk in the advice of the wicked
or stand in the pathway with sinners
or sit in the company of mockers!*

See the progression? The person described here did not intend to keep company with the wrong crowd. At least not at first. At first, it was just a conversation that led to a decision. Just walking along. But then walking turned stationary and the person was a little further along. Until eventually he took up some kind of residence with evil. He walked, then he stood, then he just sat down.

Here is the “creep” of sin, and the way we drift into it. Sin starts small—just a little compromise. But it never stays that way. We walk with it, then stand with it, then sit down right in the middle of it. And the most frightening part is that we never really intended to do any of it. It just sort of happened. We drifted into this place.

You can drift into sin unless you anchor yourself down. Unless you’re willing to take action against it, you will always follow this progression—walking, standing, then eventually sitting in the middle of it.

But while you can drift into sin, you can’t drift into holiness. Psalm 1 is calling the man who does not drift blessed, because that person does something different. Instead of drifting from walking to standing to sitting in sin, he goes another way:

*Instead, his delight is in the LORD’s instruction,
and he meditates on it day and night (Psalm 1:2).*

No drift here. Here is a commitment to God’s Word. Here is a choice to read it, learn it, and think on it again and again. Drift is complacent, passive; but meditation is humble, active. We must, then, as church leaders, emphasize and equip our families, groups, and congregations to intentionally engage God’s Word.

Principle #3: Simplicity

Thomas Kelly once said that God “never guides us into an intolerable scramble of panting feverishness.”¹

In other words, life with God and through Jesus is not meant to be complex. The Christian who is convinced of the providential love of God in Christ finds a blessed kind of simplicity. You find glimpses of this kind of simplicity expressed in Scriptures like Psalm 27:4:

*I have asked one thing from the LORD;
it is what I desire:
to dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
gazing on the beauty of the LORD
and seeking him in his temple.*

Or by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 6:33-34:

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

The idea of simplicity appeals to almost everyone, whether it comes in the form of a cell phone plan that is easy to understand or in how we read the Bible. Unfortunately, though, we have the tendency to complicate things rather than simplify them.

As we seek to cultivate a love for God's Word in the people we serve, we must, at the same time, operate under the principle of simplicity. The way we read, the tools we provide, the methodology we endorse should emphasize this principle over and over again. We should not only be seeking to get people in God's Word consistently and intentionally,

¹ Thomas R. Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion*, (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1941)

we also should make it our practice to knock down any barrier of complexity that keeps it from happening in families, groups, or congregations.

Armed with these principles, we can now move into these three key areas of congregational life and take the next step—namely, we can begin to take these principles and wrap concrete action steps around each one of them in these three spheres of congregational life.

CHAPTER 3: IMPLEMENTING CONSISTENCY

Consistency in the Family

Consistency can really be boiled down to two key factors: time and place. The specific time and specific place are somewhat irrelevant; more important is that they are the *same* time and *same* place on a daily basis.

To implement a consistent engagement with the Word of God in a family, members of the family should decide what specific time and place works best for them. For many families, the simplest and most achievable time and place to engage God's Word is at the table, around a meal. Perhaps breakfast. Again, the most important thing is not the specific time and place, but choosing one that can be repeated on a daily basis.

However, to establish a time and place for consistency, a family must be prepared to make some sacrifices and set some limitations. Let's assume, for example, that the time and place is every morning over breakfast. In order to make this a reality, parents must be willing to remove all technology from the table. They must also be willing to discipline the family members to have all homework done, all lunches made, all forms signed, and everything else that we tend to procrastinate on completed the night before. And parents must be willing to get up several minutes early in order to make sure they are completely ready for the day before breakfast. The point is clear—establishing true consistency requires planning, foresight, and sacrifice.

To help a family choose the time and place to engage God's Word, a ministry leader can lead the family to consider the following questions:

- What is your preferred time for your family to engage God's Word together?
- What is your preferred place for your family to engage God's Word together?
- What preparations do you need to make in advance in order to have an uninterrupted engagement?
- What specifically do you need to get ready beforehand in order to reduce stress in that time and place?
- What limitations do you need to impose on that time and place in order to maximize the time you spend around God's Word?

Consistency in our Groups

One of the greatest challenges to establishing consistency around reading the Bible in our groups is the simple matter of attendance. For several years, attendance frequency has been waning. Whereas 20 years ago, a person who considered himself or herself a regular church attender would be present once a week, those who consider themselves regular church attenders currently attend far less frequently. In many cases, that means only being present every other week. The challenge is obvious.

Part of the way we deal with that challenge is through emphasizing over and over again the importance of meeting regularly with the saints to engage the Word of God. We remind people that we were created to live in Christian community with each other; indeed, we need each other's help to follow Jesus. Even as we do this, though, we are fighting an uphill battle. We would be wise to fight this battle on two fronts. We fight it philosophically, but we should also be pragmatic.

At the same time we are reminding and exhorting people for more regular attendance and engagement, we should recognize the reality that for many it's just not going to happen. Rather than abandoning

these people, we should instead do our best to use the kind of resources in our groups that allow for a less regular attendance. This is accomplished by distributing some kind of study guide to every member of the group, preferably one that allows group members to track along with the progress of the group study even when they aren't physically present. The *Daily Discipleship Guide* from Explore the Bible, for example, provides five days of daily devotional readings to be completed between group meetings that coincide with the group's study. Members can therefore keep up in God's Word with the rest of the group even if they have to be absent.

Consider the following questions as you think about how to emphasize consistency in your groups:

- How are we currently emphasizing the need for regular attendance in Bible study groups?
- What mechanisms of outreach can we put in place to equip our other members to encourage attendance across the group?
- Do the resources we use in our groups allow appropriately for the reality of less regular attendance?
- How do we train our Bible study leaders to encourage attendance, but at the same time, also welcome people into the group who attend less regularly?

Consistency in our Congregation

Discipline is always easier accomplished together. Marathon runners rarely train in isolation. People on diets need to have a partner. The same thing is true when it comes to reading the Bible.

One of the simplest ways to emphasize and encourage consistency around reading the Bible, at a congregational level, is to provide or recommend a specific daily Bible reading plan. While churches might regularly do this at the beginning of a new year, it's much more effective if the plan is not simply rolled out in January but rather revisited several times throughout the year. Perhaps the staff team could consider a

stand-alone sermon every six weeks that coincides with where the congregation is in their reading plan. Or the pastor could call attention to the plan every so often from the stage during worship. Or you might consider creating a regular email campaign to the congregation around this reading plan. However you decide to do it, consistency is built through regular reminders.

As you provide these consistent reminders, it's important to remember that a comparatively small number of people will finish a Bible reading plan they begin. That's why it's also important to provide reentry points to that plan. If, for example, the reading plan starts in January, consider how you can reignite for those who have fallen off around Easter. And then again in the fall, or when a significant new section of the Bible begins on the plan.

Think about these questions as you consider how to create consistency in the congregation:

- Do we currently provide or promote a specific Bible reading plan for the entire congregation? Why or why not?
- How might we emphasize the reading plan at regular intervals?
- What is the most effective way to provide reentry points to the reading plan for our congregation?
- What are some creative ways we can further push the reading plan through our worship services and online presence?

CHAPTER 4: IMPLEMENTING INTENTIONALITY

Intentionality in the Family

Studying the Bible cannot ever become a purely intellectual exercise. We must help people see that Bible study always leads to a change in thinking, believing, or behaving. When we are teaching that philosophy from the top down in a congregation, we will see it reflected in the lives of our families.

One of the great measures of discipleship is whether families are intentionally engaging and using the Bible on a daily basis. This doesn't exclusively mean a time of family Bible study; it's further reaching than that. What we truly desire to see is families engaging the Bible during times of thanksgiving, moments of discipline, and days of discouragement. We want to see parents time and time again guiding their children to God's Word so that eventually, children will know to look to God's Word for themselves.

If the Bible is intentionally engaged in the family, it means that parents don't just discipline their children; they talk with them about what the Bible says. It means that family members don't simply make decisions in their home; they make them after the family reads the Bible to find wisdom for that decision. Again, on a daily basis, the Bible is not just read—it is *used*.

To implement intentionality in our families, consider the following questions:

- What are some creative ways we can equip parents to use the Bible to deal with issues in their homes?
- How are we demonstrating the use of the Bible to our families as a tool for everyday life?

- How can we better utilize our regular means of communication with our families to emphasize intentional use of the Bible in their homes?
- What are some stories or examples we can lift up from our congregation that demonstrate the power of the Bible in the home?

Intentionality in our Groups

Recruiting volunteers is a challenge for most congregations. It's a near constant battle for a church leader to find people willing to put in the time and effort required to lead a Bible study group with intentionality. It's simply unrealistic for us to think we will have a stable full of Bible study leaders who have the time, energy, and knowledge to just take a Bible, open it up, and lead a robust discussion that leads to life change.

One of the best things we can do, then, for Bible study leaders is to provide them with resources that are biblically faithful, thoughtfully and intentionally crafted, and easy to use. The burden, then, falls to us to find such resources.

When we are looking for intentionally biblical resources, we should consider, among other things, what in the educational world is known as a "scope and sequence." That term refers to the texts and topics of study. If we are to be intentionally biblical, we should look for a scope and sequence that will give our groups a healthy dose of all parts of the Bible and that is crafted in an intentional way. Explore the Bible, for example, is a book-by-book approach to the Bible that covers every book in nine years. Further, Explore the Bible offers everything a group needs in a single box, so one group only needs to place one order.

Think about the following questions as you seek to provide intentionality in your groups:

- What are some important factors we should consider when choosing or recommending a resource for our leaders?
- What are some ways we can remain intentionally biblical, but make preparation easier for our group leaders?
- How can we utilize technology better in order to help train our group leaders?
- What is our current process for recruiting volunteers? Are we being careful enough in our recruiting to try and ensure biblically faithful teachers and leaders?

Intentionality in our Congregation

A. W. Tozer once said that it takes a whole Bible to make a whole Christian. While we might agree with that concept, putting it into practice is altogether different.

It's human nature for us to gravitate toward people, topics, and areas we are the most comfortable with. That is also true when it comes to preaching and teaching. If left to our own devices, without an intentional plan, we will bring before the congregation the same topics and texts over and over again. To reach out of our comfort zone will take a great degree of discipline. Fortunately, there is a simple way to exercise that kind of discipline from the pulpit.

Rather than only preaching from series to series, take a specific amount of time each year to calendar and plan out the entire year of preaching. When looking at a comprehensive plan like this, it becomes easy to see if we are balanced between topical and expository series, between Old and New Testaments, between doctrine and practice, and all kinds of other guardrails. But until we put the entire plan down on paper, this balance will elude us.

As you consider how to bring intentionality to the whole congregation, think through these questions:

- As we look back over the last two years, on what recurring texts or themes have we taught over and over again? Why is that?
- What is our current plan for deciding what texts and topics to preach on? Are we confident that under this plan, our congregation is getting the whole Bible?
- What sections of Scripture have we historically neglected in our congregation? What do we hope to accomplish by bringing those to light?
- What is the best time of year to do this advanced planning? Who needs to be in that planning session as we chart out the schedule?

CHAPTER 5: IMPLEMENTING SIMPLICITY

Simplicity in the Family

Most families in our congregation want to see their children know, love, and obey God's Word. But unfortunately, many of those same families have either consciously or subconsciously relegated the reading and study of God's Word to the church. Reading and studying the Bible together as a family is often a very intimidating idea. If that's true, then the best thing we can do to encourage the engagement, and eventually, the love of the Bible in homes is to point to and provide simple tools to do so.

One of the easiest on-ramps to accomplish this is through emphasizing a link between what happens at church and what happens at home. To begin this practice, consider using a curriculum for children's Bible classes that provides parents with some kind of conversation piece they can have at home after each weekly Bible study. Emphasize to teachers the imperative nature of sending this take-home sheet, weekly email, or other piece of communication so that parents have an easy way to engage with their children over the Bible.

In the end, it does little good for us to simply state the need to engage the Bible as a family at home if we don't actively resource families with the means to do so. To help implement simplicity, here are some questions to ask yourself and your ministry team as you seek to equip families to engage God's Word:

- Are we communicating the vision effectively that parents are the primary disciple-makers of their children?
- How informed are parents as to what children are learning in their own Bible study classes?

- What is the most effective way to communicate that information in such a way that parents not only know, but can have a conversation with their children around the Bible?
- What are some creative ways in which we can encourage parents to “just get started”?

Simplicity in our Groups

“Just study the Bible.” That’s simplicity in our groups, or so we would think. But the main factors that usually contribute to this philosophy are an effort and need to save money on behalf of the church, or pressure from group leaders to teach exactly what they desire. As church leaders, it might be entirely logical that our Bible study groups, community groups, or Sunday School classes would be centered on God’s Word. It is so logical, in fact, that we might simply assume it is happening. But something so important cannot be left to assumption.

Consider, for example, a question that is frequently asked in most group settings: “What does this passage mean to you?”

It’s a question that seems innocent—even profitable—because it inevitably spurs on conversation. In reality, though, this is dangerous because the question itself implies a level of authority that we simply don’t have. It supposes that you and I have the right to determine what a passage of Scripture means to us. And what it means to me might not be what it means to you, but that’s okay, because each one of us determines the meaning on our own. And so we find ourselves on the slippery slope of relative truth in which we are all living under our own lordship. Of course, when we ask that question to ourselves or to others, we might not be intentionally alluding to this, but Rome wasn’t built in a day. Neither is a worldview formed in a moment, but only over the course of time with repeated questions like this. Questions like this reveal that our groups are not really centered on God’s Word, but rather on ourselves.

The question of being simply biblical presses the need for us, as church leaders, to seriously evaluate the resources our groups are using. This will require, for many of us, a commitment to a greater degree of control over our groups, but exercising this kind of guidance and even control is necessary to make sure our groups are not drifting toward a kind of self-lordship masquerading as genuine Bible study.

To bring about simplicity in your groups, consider the following questions:

- What is our current process for deciding what Bible study resources are used in our groups?
- Do we have the necessary checks and balances in place to make sure our groups are truly centered on God's Word?
- How are we currently training our group leaders in the way they use resources, ask questions, and guide discussion to ensure the Bible is central to their teaching?
- What specific groups should we be concerned about in this respect? What kind of conversation with those group leaders would be most effective in moving them toward a more biblical approach?

Simplicity in our Congregation

Christians are communicators. And while some Christians may be more or less gifted in the skill of communication, all Christians are "witnesses." That is, by the very fact that we have been born again into Christ and therefore have witnessed personally the power of the gospel, we are to bear witness of what we have seen and heard:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

It is inevitable. Jesus did not say "you *might* be" or "from time to time you *could* be," but instead "you *will* be" (emphasis added). We have been issued a divine summons; our appearance to testify is not optional.

So all of us, whether we be plumber or preacher, poet or pastor, are communicators of the gospel. We communicate about God, His Word, and the gospel in our homes, in our jobs, with our friends, and in our churches; therefore, the question of how we communicate should be very important to us. This is, however, especially important to pastors and teachers of the Bible.

To that end, we must seek *clarity over cleverness*. It's so easy to get enamored with our own cleverness. And in so doing, we can come up with all kinds of clever ways to try and explain things in the Bible by using illustration. But the danger of doing so is that we might end up obscuring what the Bible says with our own cleverness. In the end, as we think through illustrations, it's a wise thing to ask whether we are trusting the use of our clever rhetoric and our own ability to communicate more than the power of God's Word.

We must also emphasize being *faithful over being funny*. Humor is a powerful thing. It's a gift, and a tool we can use to help us communicate. But we should also be careful here, because it's easy to keep a bag of our "go to" stories that we know will solicit a laugh and then look for a way to bend the true content of the message in order to work them in.

And we should strive for *adoration over admiration*. Everyone likes to be liked. But the danger when we communicate—and communicate effectively—is that people might leave a conversation or a Bible study or a church service dazzled by our rhetoric and yet never brought in humility and wonder to the God we represent. If that happens, then we have garnered admiration from others, but we haven't led those others to adoration of Jesus Christ.

In the end, we must be convinced that there is power in the simple Word of God. The Word does the work. To seek simplicity in our congregations, consider the following questions:

- Are any of our attempts at cleverness obscuring the Word of God?

- What are some ways we can further emphasize our reliance and faith in God's Word alone?
- How often do we simply read the text together as a congregation? What are some ways we can incorporate more of that discipline into our regular meetings?
- Do our teachers seem to rely more on their personalities, or on the Word? How can we effectively move people more to an exclusive reliance and faith on the Bible?

CONCLUSION

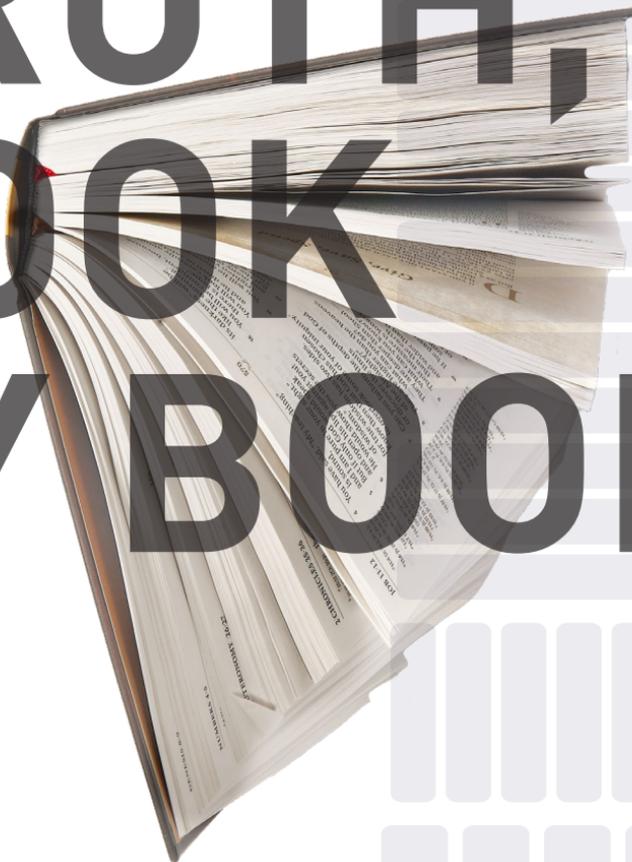
The instruction of the Lord is perfect, renewing one's life; the testimony of the Lord is trustworthy, making the inexperienced wise. The precepts of the Lord are right, making the heart glad; the command of the Lord is radiant, making the eyes light up. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are reliable and altogether righteous. They are more desirable than gold—than an abundance of pure gold; and sweeter than honey dripping from a honeycomb. In addition, your servant is warned by them, and in keeping them there is an abundant reward.

- Psalm 19:7-11 (CSB)

God's Word is renewing, enlightening, gladdening, enduring, sanctifying, and rewarding. It is sweeter than honey and it is better than gold.

God's Word is power for our churches, life for our groups, and hope for our homes. As we cultivate a love for what God has revealed, we can experience the benefits He has promised. May we pursue that with intentionality, consistency, and simplicity. For God has not left us without a Word.

THE WHOLE TRUTH, BOOK BY BOOK



EXPLORE THE BIBLE®

goexplorethebible.com