

2 Timothy 2:15 – **You: God’s approved workman**

Adapted from "The Bible - Worth The Effort (Pt. 2)" by Chris Talton @ Sermon Central.Com

How much do you value the fact that you have a Bible you can pick up and read for yourself?

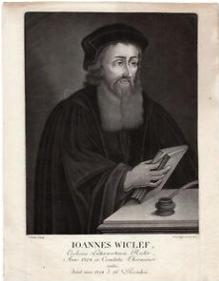
Οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸν κόσμον,
ὥστε τὸν Υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν,
ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν
μὴ ἀπόληται ἀλλ’ ἔχη ζωὴν αἰώνιον.

No, I have not started speaking in tongues; I was just reading from the New Testament - in Greek - which is the language that it was originally written in.

How many of you understood what I just said?

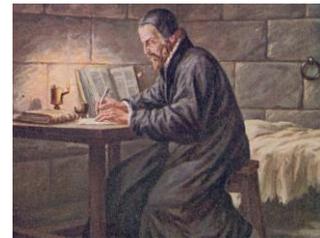
in English, that verse says: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that everyone believing in Him should not perish but have life eternal."*

How would you like it if in order to read that simple truth for yourself, you had to learn to read Greek or Latin?



It wasn't until the year 1382 that a man named **John Wycliff**, for the first time ever, completed an English translation of the whole New Testament from the Latin text; the Old Testament 2 years later.

It wasn't until 1525, that **William Tyndale**, was able to produce an English translation of the New Testament directly from the Greek text; with the complete Bible following in



1535. Why was translating directly from the Greek so important? Because the Latin version of the Bible was already a translation from the Greek. So to come from the Latin version into English would be to make a translation of a translation; compounding any errors that may have been introduced in the Latin version.

You would think that the church leaders of their day would have been glad to now have a translation that the common person could read and understand for themselves. How did the leaders react to Wycliff and Tyndale's work?

During John Wycliff's life, he was excommunicated and hunted by the church for his translation work and practice of teaching directly from the Biblical text. Thankfully, under the protection of the English king, Wycliff died a natural death, but years later, his bones were dug up, ceremonially burned as an act of condemnation, and the ashes thrown into the river.



Tyndale didn't fare as well. In 1535 He was arrested, tried, and convicted of the crime of publishing a version of the Bible that could be read by the common people. His sentence was that he would be strangled to death and then burned at the stake.

Why were church leaders so violently opposed to non-clergy having a Bible in their own language? The stated reason was that they did not think the common person could understand the Bible for themselves. They feared that if everyone had access to the Bible, they would not interpret it correctly, and all kinds of weird teachings would result.

To a certain extent, they were right. Persons who handle God's Word incorrectly will come up with all kinds of strange ideas and may even lead other people astray. This has happened quite often in the years since 1535 and it continues happening in churches today; someone somewhere right now is using the Bible to teach their own twisted ideas about God and salvation. But the real underlying reason that the church authorities did not want the commoners to have access to the Bible is because they feared the loss of **power**.

What would happen if I take all of your Bibles away from you? I remove all the Bibles from the church, from your home, from your car, from the Internet, your Ipads and smart phones; everywhere that you might have access to them. The only Bible left in this church would be the one that I am reading from this morning, and this one is no longer in English but now once again only in Latin or Greek.

Suddenly, I become very powerful. You have no way of checking up on me to discover whether or not I am telling you the truth. When I say that the Bible says something is true, you have no choice but to accept it if you want to live in obedience to Jesus.

I can say:

- "The Bible says, ' Get up, and hop on one foot if you want to go to heaven.'
- The Bible says, ' Sell your houses and your cars and give the money to the church.'
- The Bible says, ' Each of you must in turn bring dinner over to the pastor's house so that the pastor's belly is filled each night.'"

None of those are found in the Bible – except maybe that last one - but if you don't have a Bible, and can't read that Bible, then you have no way of knowing the truth. You become my Pinocchio's, and I become your Gapeto. I hold the strings that control you because I know what the Bible says, and you don't.

God didn't put me here as your pastor in order for me to exert power over you. He put me in this place as His gift to help *equip you for doing the work of ministry, for building each other up until we all come to maturity and unity in faith towards Christ Jesus*

(Ephesians 4:12-13). And my main tool for doing this is by teaching you both from God's Word and how to read, understand, and apply God's Word for yourself.

Jesus said, 'search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf.
John 5:39

Those men who through the years gave their lives to produce an English translation of the Bible, knew the importance of individuals being able to read, understand and apply the Word of God for themselves. If we allow this book to sit on the shelf and gather dust, are we not mocking the memory of these who sacrificed so much to get it into our hands? Are we not also ignoring the commands of Jesus, the person who our Bible speaks about?

In this letter, Paul will remind Timothy that he had been learning God's word from a very early age.

from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.
2 Timothy 3:15

And in the section we read today, Paul urges him to become "*God's approved workman*" correctly interpreting and applying the scriptures.

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.
2 Timothy 2:15

Ok pastor, so you have made your point; I should be reading and learning from my Bible for myself. But you have gone through years of training in college and seminary just to be able to teach the Bible. Do you actually expect us to gain the same level of competence in handling God's word for ourselves..... **Yes. Yes I do.**

For twelve years now I have been serving you weekly spoonfuls of pre-digested Biblical teaching each Sunday while urging you to dig deeper for yourselves and to join one of

our mid-week study groups in order that you might grow past surviving only on Biblical milk to actually thriving on the meat of the word – so that one day you might also become “God’s Approved Workman.”

Did you know that around 10% of pastors currently serving our local Presbyterian Churches never graduated from seminary, may not even have graduated from college, but instead grew in their faith and Biblical knowledge through their local church. Then with some specialized classes taken right here in the Bedford, Roanoke area, they went on to become commissioned as Lay Pastors. They are just “ordinary” people every Sunday standing in a pulpit, teaching and learning the Bible together with their church members.

In fact as fewer churches remain able to support a full-time seminary trained pastor, that pastoral responsibility will fall perhaps on some of you to pick up your Bibles and climb into the pulpit to deliver God’s word to His people. And **You can do this** if you are willing; rightly handling and teaching God’s truth is not rocket science.... The problems actually come in when one foolishly goes beyond God’s revealed truths to teaching their own speculative theologies. The remedy for such Biblical wandering is doing your Bible study in groups that can discuss and discern the meaning behind difficult passages. As the Apostle Peter assures us...

God’s divine power has given us
everything needed for life and godliness,
through the knowledge of him who called us
2 Peter 1:3

Then if we heed the Apostle Paul’s warning

[teach] Nothing Beyond What is Written.
Ephesians 6:4

We truly have everything we need right here with our Bible. So let me briefly outline how by your own willingness to read, study, and apply the teachings of that Bible you are holding in your hands, you can become another one of God’s approved workers.

Observation – what does the Bible say?
Interpretation – what does it mean for me?
Application – how do I put it into practice?
Meditation – how can I hang on to this truth?

Observation – What does it say?

First, start with a pen and paper close to hand so you can write down notes and questions. Because you should always come to the Bible like an explorer, with a desire to learn something new about God or yourself.

There is a basic difference between an explorer and a tourist. The tourist travels quickly, stopping only to observe the highly noticeable or publicized points of interest. The explorer, on the other hand, travels slowly, putting in the effort, walking down all the side roads, searching out everything that they can find about a place or topic.

Too many of us read the Bible like tourists and then complain that our devotional times are fruitless. It is necessary that we take time to explore what the Bible is actually saying to us. Ask questions of the text as you go through it. Who is speaking here? What is the writer trying to say? What has happened just before this verse and what happens after this event? This is called looking at the **context**. You cannot accurately understand the Bible unless you look at how the preceding and following sections might shape your understanding of the portion you are reading.

A man got on the subway after a long day at work. The car which he entered was occupied by another man with two young boys sitting beside him. After the train began to move, one of the boys went up to the wall of the train and started kicking the wall and banging his head against the glass. The other boy began to hit on the shoulder of the man he was sitting next to and began to wail uncontrollably. The commuter who had entered the train at the last stop could control himself no longer and said to the other man, "Are these boys your sons?" "Yes" "Don't you find their behavior unacceptable? Why don't you stop them?" "Oh, I find their behavior very acceptable. The man replied, "you see, they just watched their mother die in the hospital."

In order for that traveler to understand the actions of those boys, he had to understand what preceded their action. If I wanted to, I could pull bits and pieces out of the Bible from all sorts of areas and make it say whatever I want it to say. One of the most dangerous ways to abuse the bible is to take one portion of the text out of its context and focus on it as a biblical truth: For instance I can show you very clearly where the Bible teaches that we apparently have to live in a boat if we want to go to heaven.



'Unless you stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.'
Acts 27:31

But when you read the surrounding context, you will discover that at this moment, Paul was more worried about sailors drowning in a stormy sea rather than their eternal salvation.

If you come to the Bible with a pen and paper and a mind that wants to discover and grow, God will open up all kinds of new worlds to you.

After Observation comes Interpretation – What does it mean for me?

Sometimes, what a Bible passage says is exactly what it means. (i.e. John 3:16) But there are other passages that need a little bit more explanation. Such as Jesus' remark ... *I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God* (Matthew 19:24). That one takes a little bit more explanation. If I take this saying at face value, then our church is located in the wrong part of town. There is no use trying to reach people who are rich because they can't get to heaven anyway. But Jesus went on to explain Himself. He said that with humans this is impossible, but *with God all things are possible*. Cheer up fellow rich people, God can save us even though we never could save ourselves. By the way, this is also true of poor people. It is impossible for anyone to come to God without God FIRST intervening in their lives.

There is only one correct interpretation to any biblical text. But even still, some texts are hard to understand. So how can we be sure that the interpretation we give to a particular text is accurate?

First, we let Scripture interpret itself. The same topic is often dealt with in multiple places throughout the Bible. Whatever passage that you are dealing with, find other passages that talk about the same thing (that's what all those tiny cross-references in your Bible are for). By comparing passages in the Bible with one another, you will be better able to understand both. Always let the clear passages interpret the unclear.

Then after Observation and interpretation comes Application – How do I put this into practice? How does this truth impact my life? There is only one correct interpretation of any Bible passage, but it may have many different applications. **John 3:16** has one interpretation. It means that God loves us so much that He sent His Son to be our savior so that those who come to him in faith could dwell with God forever.

But John 3:16 has different applications in your life depending on your current relationship to Jesus Christ. If you are **unsaved**, the application is that you need to take advantage of God's gift and trust Christ to be your savior. If you are **saved**, the application is that God really loves the city of Bedford. We need to tell them about that love.

The process of understanding God's Word doesn't have any value for you until you have completed this application step. **How is what I have read and understood going to change the way that I live my life today?**

Observation, Interpretation, Application, Meditation/Memorization: How can I hang on to what I have learned?

Meditation is not the practice of humming the Bible (ohmmmmm) but of chewing on the Bible mulling over its lessons repeatedly to get its teachings deep down inside your life to stay. Did you know that a cow has 4 stomachs? [*explain the process by which food goes from each stomach being re-chewed over and over again until all the nutrients in that food have been absorbed*]. That is how we are to treat our Bible studies, coming back to that verse or truth again and again until we are sure to remember it....

How many of you worry? Good, I'm glad that you know how to worry. The reason that I am glad that you know how to worry is because that means that you also know how to meditate.

Do you know the differences between the meditation that yoga tells you to do and the meditation that the Bible talks about?

Yoga tells you to empty your mind and meditate on nothingness. Worry is when you fill up your mind with all the bad stuff that is going on in your life or could go on in your life.

For some of you, your worrying gets so bad that it controls all of your other activities. You worry about getting fat, so you don't eat. You worry that something bad is going to happen to your house, so you stay home. Worry is when you fill your mind with all these fears. **Meditation is the same process; it's just that instead of filling your mind with fears, you fill your mind with good thoughts, with Bible truths.**

whatever is true, whatever is honorable,
whatever is just, whatever is pure,
whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable,
if there is any excellence, anything worthy of praise,
think about these things.

Phil 4:8

The result of worry and meditation should be the same – whatever you put inside your head is what controls every other aspect of your life. Worrying just makes your life miserable. Meditation allows the food of God's Word to sink deep down inside of us

and become a part of us as we think about it, mull it over in our mind until the light clicks on.

Part of the process of meditation is memorization. That is the practice of taking portions of the Bible and committing them to memory. Now, I know that for some of you, to memorize the Bible is a scary idea. You say, "*I have trouble remembering what I was after when I opened the refrigerator door. How in the world am I supposed to remember Bible verses?*" And yet, many of you just remembered your lines to our upcoming play, A Heart For God in the Heart of Bedford. Those lines weren't hard to learn because you wanted to do this, you were motivated, excited about your part in the play. Why should you be any different with God's word? The Psalmist says, *Thy word have I hid in my heart so that I might not sin against you* (Psalm 119:11).

Even if you are not able to memorize larger portions of the Bible, the very act of spending the time going over a verse repeatedly will have an impact on you and will begin to imprint its words into your life.

C. H. Spurgeon said, "***A Bible which is falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn't!***"

Reading the Bible will give you a lot of information about history, science, theology, philosophy, people and many other topics. But the reason God gave us the Bible is not simply that we might gain information. **He wants that information to transform us.** To change the way we think about ourselves, about God, about the world we live in, and certainly also the way we live and act. Paul assures us that if we allow God's Spirit through the work of His word to transform us, then we will know what is God's will for our lives (Rom 12:2 NIV)

The profit to Bible study is not in what you learn by your study but in your obedience to what you have learned. As James the brother of Jesus warns us, *be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.* (James 1:22). The Bible will either keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from the Bible.

Let's pray about this.