

A Passion for God's Word

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You and the Bible

The Bible is an extraordinary book, not just in terms of its unique history and compilation but also in its claims to hold the ultimate revelation of God himself. We should never lose our sense of wonder at the fact that we can even hold it in our hands. Many Christians around the world today do not have such open access to the Bible and the majority of Christians down through history never held a Bible in their hands.

First-century believers would have been amazed at the ease at which today's Christians can buy a Bible, and equally astonished at the casual attitude most Christians hold toward the Word of God. For them, the scrolls and parchments that recorded God's Word were a treasure beyond comparison.

As Antony of Egypt commented back in the third century, "Be astounded that God should have written to us."

It is not uncommon in the West for a home to have more than one Bible. And yet for many people, the Bible remains on the shelf, dusted off for special occasions or maybe carried

as a symbol of spirituality on church visits. We may have open access to the Bible, but for the vast majority of people, the Bible remains a closed book.

A True Story

During a trip into mainland China, a group of Hong Kong Christians visited a remote village. This village was a farming community with no electricity, running water or other modern conveniences. The visitors were surprised to find that, out of the village of 200, one elderly lady and her son were Christians. They had committed their life to the Lord some seven years earlier and had faced constant ridicule and persecution from their relatives and neighbors.

When one member of the team gave the woman her own Bible, she clutched it to her chest, weeping for joy. For seven years, she explained, she had been earnestly praying that the Lord provide her with a Bible. With tears streaming down her face, she looked up to heaven and thanked God for hearing her prayer.

An Open Book

God's intention, however, is that the Bible be an open book for you. He has invested within its pages a description of his will and plan for your life. So what makes the Bible open up – come alive, so to speak?

Read Luke 8:11-15

This parable of Jesus highlights the one factor that makes the difference between the Bible being a closed book or an open book for you – the receptivity of your heart (for the full parable, read [Luke 8:4-15](#)). In this famous parable, four kinds of hearts are described:

- **A calloused heart** – a heart that is hardened against God's Word.
- **A shallow heart** – a heart with little depth for God's Word to take permanent root.
- **A distracted heart** – a heart pulled away from God's Word, torn in many directions by desires or worries.
- **An open heart** – a heart receptive and responsive to the Word of God.

Now here comes the important question. Which kind of heart do you have? By taking a regular inventory of your heart's condition, you can make sure that you have an open heart toward God's Word.

The hardening of a person's heart can happen if he or she consistently refuses to obey the promptings of God's Spirit or puts up barriers against God due to hurts and emotional wounds. If you find that your heart is in any way hardened, the answer is simple: ask God to soften it. Even that request is a major step forward toward God opening your heart to his Word.

If you believe your heart lacks depth, the answer lies in two areas – 1) maintaining a daily intimacy with God in prayer and 2) obedience to his Word in the face of difficult circumstances. Remember: a shallow heart still receives God's Word. What is needed is to allow the Word of God to take root and bear fruit. This can only happen through consistency and perseverance (read [Romans 15:4](#)).

If you find your heart is distracted by the "cares of this world," the Word of God itself holds the answer. By responding specifically to God's promises concerning issues of material concerns ([Matthew 6:24-34](#); [Hebrews 13:5-6](#)), you can clear your heart's field of any distractions to God's Word.

Facts Worth Noting

- The Bible is the world's undisputed bestseller, topping the charts every single year.
- The Bible has been translated into more languages than any other book.
- The Bible has played a significant role in the shaping of international laws, educational systems and the standards by which we judge human rights.

Read Hosea 10:12

Regardless of the condition of your heart, the Holy Spirit has been sent to help you plow up the ground of your heart in preparation for receiving the Word of God. The action of God's Word itself can have a plowing effect, exposing the thoughts and attitudes of your heart (read [Hebrews 4:12](#)).

KEY THOUGHT

The key to the Bible becoming an open book for you is this:

Closed heart → Closed book

Open heart → Open book

An open heart to God's Word is not a rare condition. It is a result of the plowing action of God's Spirit and constant exposure to God's Word. And, as we shall see as we continue through this course, having an open heart to God is part of what it means to be a new creation in Christ.

Two Characteristics of an Open Heart

There are two main characteristics of a heart open to God's Word:

Hunger for the Word of God

Nothing can substitute for a driving hunger for God's Word. It is not enough just to open the Bible. There must be a hunger for God to reveal himself in his Word. If you feel like there is not yet a hunger for the Word of God, make this a priority in prayer. Ask God to give you a hunger for his Word and you will find that this is a prayer he delights in answering.

Read Proverbs 2:1-6

If you've already discovered the stirrings of hunger for God's Word, then you will find that the Bible's pages will ring with the voice of God's Spirit. God has hidden treasures for you in his Word. Each page is like the "cave of wonders" in the story of Aladdin, a hidden labyrinth of treasures - spiritual gold, silver and precious gemstones. But the key that unlocks all those treasures is the hunger of an open heart.

Read Psalm 19:7-11**COMMENT**

A hunger for God's Word is the hallmark of a close walk with God. If you feel you don't yet have a deep hunger for the Word of God, you will probably find that your relationship with God is somewhat distant. Conversely, if you consistently spend time with the Lord each day, you'll find that your hunger for his Word will deepen.

Obedience to the Word of God

When God specifically highlights an area of your life he wants to change, God requires you to respond in an act of obedience.

Read James 1:22-25

Obedience is the evidence of a life genuinely aligned with God in love for him (read **1 John 5:3**). No one earns points with God for the number of sermons they listen to, nor for how many times they have read the Bible through. What counts with God is not that we talk the talk, but that we walk the walk.

Read 1 John 2:3-6

Now that you have read this passage, we encourage you to stop, go back and read it again.

What is this passage talking about? What is the measuring stick it places against your life? Without a doubt this is one of the most challenging statements in the Bible (yes, you can go back and read it again, if you want!).

Read John 15:9-10

Notice how the Bible does not say that if you obey God, he will accept you. The Bible says that we have already been accepted in Christ (**Ephesians 1:4-6**). This is the wonder of the work of the Cross on our behalf. What the Bible does do, however, is equate “remaining in my love” with “obeying my commands.” This means that you cannot claim to have a close relationship with God yet live a lie. Obeying God is proof of the genuineness of your intimacy with God. You cannot have one without the other.

Read Luke 6:46-49

As you study with the Online Bible College, you will find that a major emphasis of the course content is on relationship with God through the study of his Word. But that relationship is founded upon an ongoing lifestyle of obedience. Don't just *read* the word of God; *do* the word of God.

Trembling at God's Word

Our attitude to God's Word sets the pace for how that Word will affect our lives. If we treat the Word of God lightly, we should not be surprised if that Word has little impact on our lives.

Read Isaiah 66:2b

What does it mean to “tremble at God's Word”? The Bible itself encourages us to stand in awe of God's Word and gives us many examples of those who do (for example, **Psalms 119:161**). We should never treat the Word of God casually. If we disregard God's Word for our lives, we will experience the penalties of a life not

aligned to God. This is no light matter. The “trembling” described in the Bible, however, is not a reaction of fear but an attitude of awe.

God, through his Word, will convict you of sin (anything in your life that is not aligned with God’s holiness). You then have a decision: do you harden yourself against his Word and find an excuse for why it does not apply to you, or do you respond in obedience to that Word? Your choice will directly affect your continuing openness to God’s Word and thus the impact of that Word on your life.

The Author of the Bible

In order to dig deep for the treasures found in God’s Word, you need to get to know the one who wrote the Bible. As an example, if someone were to write you a letter, the first thing you would do is take a look at the bottom of the letter to see who wrote it. That one item of knowledge – knowing who authored the letter – puts the whole letter into perspective.

In the same way, when we read the Bible, an important first step is to know who wrote the Bible. The Bible is unique, however, in that it has two levels of authorship. Let’s take a quick look at these two levels:

The human author

Each and every book of the Bible had at least one human author (and occasionally more than one). Sometimes these authors are identified at the beginning of the book itself (check [Ephesians 1:1](#); [Jeremiah 1:1](#)); sometimes they are not (check [Hebrews](#); [Genesis](#)), although ancient tradition and scholarly investigation have often combined to identify the most likely writer.

When you study the Bible, it is a valuable exercise to acquaint yourself with the writer of that book (if he is known), as well as the identity of those to whom he is writing, since this will shed light on the content of his writings. Each human author has his own particular writing style and emotional background, which reflects on the content of his book, something we will see in a later lesson.

The divine author

Despite the fact that the words of the Bible were penned by over 40 different human agents, the Bible itself is emphatic that behind each human author is the Holy Spirit himself. Without taking this into account, the Bible is nothing more than a window on the past and no more relevant to life today than a history textbook or an ancient farming manual.

This higher level of authorship – the authorship of God himself, inspiring the human writers – is what makes the Bible unlike any other book. And the Holy Spirit is not only the source of the Bible’s inspiration; he is also the one who weaves all the threads of the Bible together into one resounding theme: the action of God to realign human lives to his purpose and will.

Read Acts 4:25-26**Read Acts 28:26-27**

Both these New Testament passages are quotations drawn from the Old Testament. The first is a quotation from a psalm written by David and the second is a quotation from a prophecy penned by Isaiah. Yet in both instances, the Bible states clearly that the Holy Spirit “spoke through” these human writers.

Read 2 Timothy 3:16**Read 2 Peter 1:20-21**

Many different kinds of men wrote the Bible:

- kings
- shepherds
- fishermen
- historians
- priests
- a scribe
- a tax collector
- a doctor
- a royal cup-bearer
- a government official
- a sycamore-fig tree tender

Yet each of them was “carried along by the Holy Spirit” so that what he wrote could be described as “God-breathed.” In fact, some of the human authors of the Old Testament prophetic books did not fully comprehend everything “to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing.”

Read 1 Peter 1:10-12

Within the pages of the Bible, a “mystery” slowly unfolds, “hidden for long ages past,” that only becomes fully understood with the coming of Christ (read **Romans 16:25-26**). And so we see the authorship of the Holy Spirit evident on two levels – in guiding the words and content of scripture and in unfolding the “mystery” of God’s redemptive plan. It is the authorship of the Holy Spirit that makes the Bible a supernatural book.

The Spirit and the Word

Having authored the Bible, however, the Holy Spirit’s involvement in God’s Word does not end there. The Holy Spirit and the Word of God continue to form a close partnership so that you cannot have one without the other. In fact, many of their descriptions overlap.

- The Holy Spirit is called “the Spirit of truth” (read **John 15:26**) and God’s Word is called “the word of truth” (read **James 1:18**).

- The Holy Spirit is called “the Spirit of life” (read **Romans 8:2**) and God’s Word is called “the word of life” (read **Philippians 2:16**).
- The Holy Spirit is called “the Spirit of grace” (read **Hebrews 10:29**) and God’s Word is called “the word of his grace” (read **Acts 20:32**).

God’s Spirit and his Word go hand in glove (note **Ephesians 6:17**). Both play a vital and complementary role in the Christian life. Many Christians, however, have an overbalance with one or the other. Some Christians are Spirit-oriented – they emphasize the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the moving of the Spirit in their lives. Others are Word-oriented – they put an emphasis on the teaching of God’s Word and the establishing of strong biblical foundations.

Both the Spirit and the Word are needed. If you have God’s Spirit without his Word, your life will lack boundaries. You will be like a river without banks. On the other hand, without the Holy Spirit’s work in your life, your life will have no power. You will be like river banks without a river flowing between. Both the Holy Spirit and his Word have equally vital roles to play in bringing the Christian toward the goal of maturity in Christ. The Spirit of God provides the impetus; the Word of God provides the direction.

The Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation

Read Ephesians 1:17-18

Note that in this passage Paul writes that he “keeps asking” that God give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. He keeps on praying, not because he believes that God hasn’t heard him, but because he knows that his prayer needs to be answered on a continual basis. Each and every day, we need the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in our lives (see also **Colossians 1:9**).

Revelation

Revelation is the “eyes of your heart [being] enlightened” by the action of the Holy Spirit. This is the essential ingredient that opens up the Word of God to become a dynamic force in your life.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:9-10

The Holy Spirit reveals to us the heart of the Father through his Word. Through him we are able to “search the deep things of God” found in the pages of God’s Word.

It’s an amazing thing that it is technically possible for a person to read the Bible from cover to cover, yet not capture the heart of what God is saying. This is because it is only when a heart is open to the revealing work of the Holy Spirit that the Bible suddenly comes alive and its God-breathed secrets laid bare.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:13-16

Before our spirit is regenerated by God's Spirit, there is a spiritual "veil" over our minds when we read the Bible. But note the wonderful promise of God. We do not need to pray that God take away the veil. In Christ it has already been removed, because "whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away."

When we believe on the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit – the divine author of the God's Word – is sent into our hearts (read **Ephesians 1:13**). He is one who switches on the internal lights so that you can understand his Word. It is at this point that what people call the Bible becomes the unveiled Word of God *for you personally*.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:12-14

The Bible is written in "words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words." What the Holy Spirit originally inspired, he now reveals on a personal basis to you. What was originally Spirit-breathed is now Spirit-discerned.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:6

Revelation means that something suddenly "clicks" with our spirit, like the "lights going on" on the inside, and we suddenly see things the way God sees them. This is a supernatural event. In the same way that the Holy Spirit "brooded" over the waters at the time of creation (see **Genesis 1:2**), so he now broods over his Word to make it come alive to those who belong to him. And just as God spoke into the original darkness and said, "Let there be light!" (see **Genesis 1:3**), so he now speaks into the darkness of our heart to reveal the light of his truth.

Wisdom

Wisdom is the practical application of revelation to our lives. It's not enough just to get a revelation of God; wisdom causes us to move closer to him. It's not enough just to have a revelation of sin; wisdom takes steps to deal with that sin.

Read James 1:5

Wisdom is imparted to the Christian life by the Holy Spirit through his Word. Not only was Paul asking continually (in **Ephesians 1:17**) that we receive the Spirit of wisdom, but we are also encouraged to ask for wisdom.

Read Isaiah 11:1-2

In this passage, Isaiah prophesies that the Messiah would have resting upon him "the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding." Paul is alluding to this prophecy when he writes to the Ephesian Christians about being given "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation." He is praying that the same Spirit that rested on the Lord Jesus Christ would also rest upon us as believers in Christ.

It is a combination of these two ingredients – *revelation* and *wisdom* – that makes the Word of God "living and active" (read **Hebrews 4:12**).

- Revelation is *inspired* understanding (read **1 John 5:20**) – the “living” aspect of God’s Word.
- Wisdom is *applied* understanding (read **Matthew 11:19; James 3:13**) – the “active” aspect of God’s Word.

Revelation opens our eyes to God’s thoughts; wisdom directs our feet in God’s ways.

The Holy Spirit as Teacher

Read John 14:26

As has already been emphasized, the Spirit of God and the Word of God are inseparable. For this reason, the Holy Spirit is our primary teacher. He takes the written Word and makes it the “living and active” Word for us personally.

Read 1 John 2:27

The Holy Spirit is described as “the anointing you received from [God]” – an anointing that remains in you and “teaches you about all things.” Some have said, on the basis of this one verse, that Christians do not need human teachers. This of course is not true, since the Bible describes the ministry of the teacher (**Ephesians 4:13; 2 Timothy 2:2**) and we are even encouraged to “teach one another” (**Colossians 3:16**).

In order to understand what John is meaning by this verse, let’s do something that is always important in Bible study – look at the verse in its context.

Read 1 John 2:24-29

John is not telling us that there are no longer any teachers in the Church. What he is doing is warning against “those who are trying to lead you astray.”

The Holy Spirit will not teach anything contrary to his Word. There will never be a contradiction between the Spirit of God and the Word of God. The mark of the anointing of God’s Spirit is that he will encourage you to “remain in him” (verse 27). And the fruit of the anointing of God’s Spirit is that he will empower you to do “what is right” (verse 29).

What we need to recognize is that unless the Holy Spirit is teaching (whether it be through personal study of the Bible or through hearing a teacher of the Bible), no genuine learning will take place. And the mark of the genuine anointing of God’s Spirit upon his Word is that, firstly, it will draw you into a walk of **intimacy** with God (“remain in him”) and secondly, it will energize a walk of **obedience** to God (doing “what is right”).

These two aspects – intimacy and obedience – are the twin goals of the Holy Spirit and the fruit of genuine study of God’s Word.

Conclusion

In this first lesson, we have looked at what the Bible means to you:

- How the Bible becomes an open book for you.
- How the Holy Spirit has inspired God's Word.
- How the Holy Spirit continues to reveal God's Word.

Even at this early point in your study at the Online Bible College, we want you to understand the emphasis that we place upon obedience to God's Word, not just the study of God's Word. Hopefully by now you know that reading the Bible is not simply an academic exercise. In fact, far from being an intellectual matter, it is an intensely personal one. A person who studies the Bible for its academic value may learn many wonderful things, but will never hear the voice of God personally. However, a person who has a hunger for God's voice will experience the Bible to be just what it is – the Word of God.