



Responding to God's Word From Duty-Motivated Hearers to Purpose-Filled Doers

The Dangers

If there was one thing made abundantly clear to me as a church going teenager, it was that in order to be a good church going teenager I had to have my quiet time. Reading the Bible was non-negotiable. So in order to be a good Christian kid, I dragged myself out of bed, with eyes half opened and nothing actually penetrating my brain, and read my Bible. When I read it, I felt good about myself. When I didn't, I felt an overwhelming sense of guilt. It only made sense that if everything in life depended upon my quiet time, and I missed my quiet time, then essentially I had missed everything. In my mind missing my quiet time amounted to failing at the only thing that really mattered.

I am, without question, thankful for the emphasis that was placed upon reading my Bible. The intentions behind it were good, but there was one major problem: the purpose for reading was not clear, and Bible reading became little more than Christian duty. Bible reading plans became nothing more than a written account of my failures. Although the duty was engrained into my mind, the purpose for reading was not. So I was left seeing Bible reading as an end—not the means to an end. As a result, I was nothing more than a hearer of God's Word who was deluded into thinking that by hearing I was somehow fulfilling my Christian duty.

What I failed to realize was that there was actually a purpose behind reading God's Word that was greater than the desire to avoid feeling guilty—getting behind in my Bible reading plan, and not having an answer for my “accountability partner.” Honestly, this is not just a small problem. It is dangerous to read the Bible primarily out of a sense of duty. It is dangerous to read the Bible without knowing why you are reading the Bible. It is dangerous because failure to realize the purpose of Bible reading makes Bible reading a tiresome duty. It also leaves us as people who are motivated to *read* the Word but not motivated to *respond* to the Word.

So what is the purpose?

The Purpose

The purpose for Bible reading is the same as the purpose for all spiritual disciplines—Godliness. We read God's Word because as believers we were called before the foundation of the world to be conformed into the image of Christ; the primary means by which God intended to do this is through His Word. The Bible is unlike any other book. It is a living book through which the power of the Holy Spirit brings us into an encounter with the living God every time we open it. Each time we encounter God through His Word, it is so that in some way we may better know Him and reflect Him. We must come to the place where we *long* to read God's Word because we know that if we do not fill ourselves with the Word of God, we will fail to ever look like Jesus and, in turn, fail to be what we were created and called to be.

The beauty of clarifying the purpose of Bible reading is that it changes everything about *how* we read the Bible. It is embracing the purpose of reading God's Word that begins to transform us from duty-bound hearers to purpose-filled doers. If we are reading the Bible so that we may know Christ and be conformed into His image, we are always reading looking for something new about Him and some new way to apply His Word to our lives. In other words, responding to God's Word becomes essential once we understand the purpose for reading.

So how do we respond properly to God's Word?

Responding to God's Word

Here are a few ways to respond to God's Word. You can discern what is best based upon your own personality and the specific text. Remember, the purpose of all response is that you may be a doer of the Word. The purpose for being a doer of the Word is so that the Word can produce its intended result in your life—namely, Christ-likeness.

Ask Questions: As you are reading, continue to ask a few key questions. What is the purpose of this text? What is God saying about Himself? What is God saying about me? What is God telling me to do? How can I apply this text today?

Journaling: A wonderful way to respond to the Word of God is to keep a “Truth and Response” journal. As you are reading, you might find one particular passage that speaks to you in a special way. After you read, take out your notebook and write out four categories: 1) Verse, 2) Truth, 3) Response, and 4) Prayer. Take that specific verse, find the truth that God is communicating in that verse about Himself and His people. Write a specific way to respond to that truth, and a prayer specifically about it. Remember, all response must be based upon truth, so finding the truth helps you know how to respond. (Psalm 77:11-12; Psalm 62:8)

Meditating: Take a verse or passage from your reading and reflect upon it immediately and throughout the whole day. Stop immediately after reading and take 10 minutes to reflect on every word of the verse. As you are driving to work, meditate on a verse instead of turning on the radio. Taking the time to meditate upon God’s Word will allow the Word to take deep root in your heart and allow the Lord opportunity to speak to you more specifically. Meditating is essentially stopping to make sure the truth you read actually does its life altering work in you. (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-3)

Worshiping and Praying: George Mueller noted that his entire prayer life was changed when he began to pray after reading the Word instead of before. After reading the Word, he felt his heart full of things for which to praise God, thank God, and request of God. Use the Word of God as the springboard to your prayers and worship. Pray through specific passages, asking the Lord to do a work in you. Take specific texts and worship the Lord from them. (Psalm 19)

Sharing: Make a specific effort to share with someone each day what the Lord has been saying to you through the Word. Share with a family member, a business associate, a friend, or a neighbor. Whether they are a believer or an unbeliever, this is a great way for you to show how God has a real and genuine influence on your daily life. (Colossians 4:5-6)

Writing and Watching: If you find a specific text in your Bible reading that you know you need to apply, write it down on a note card, ask the Lord to use it in your life specifically that day, keep it with you throughout the day, and watch as the Lord makes that passage real in your life. I have seen the Lord do this many times in my life. I have found that when I am expecting by faith for the Lord to use His Word in my life, then He responds.

A Final Word

There are certainly many other ways of responding to the Word of God, but in order for any of these to be helpful, we must approach the Word of God every day with a spirit of submission. Remember that we are reading the words of the Sovereign King, and we are humble servants in His kingdom. We must continually be looking for ways we can submit to the authority of God in our lives and respond daily and faithfully to His Word.

Remember, the entrance through the small gate is also the entrance onto the narrow path. This is the path of Christ-likeness, and our primary means of wisdom, guidance, help, encouragement, faith, and coaching along this path is the Word of God. Let us hold it tightly, use it daily, and submit to it faithfully that we may know Him and reflect Him.

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