

# From Information

By Dan Schaeffer

**M**ark Twain said, "It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me; it is the parts that I do understand." If you are like me, you can identify with this thought. I've often found myself reading the Bible the way I would read a textbook, looking for new information.

Sometimes we forget the Bible is not merely a textbook, but a letter written by God to us, to help us know him better and understand his will.

## The Greater Purpose

Paul reminds us in 2 Timothy 3:16 that "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." While it is important to understand what the Bible says and means, collecting information from the Bible is only a means to an end. The end is transformation.

Paul wrote, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:2).

We can act like sponges, soaking up the wonderful new truths we are learning and finding the answers to our intellectual questions. But any reading of the Bible that seeks only information ultimately misses the mark. Learning truths about God is not the same as allowing those truths to change our hearts and minds.

Years ago a man used to amaze people by memorizing the New York City phone book. He would recite the phone book line by line. While his act was surely impressive, it was of doubtful usefulness. If we're not careful, the Bible can become little more than a divine encyclopedia of information to satisfy our spiritual curiosity.

## Application and Surrender

When we learn something in the Bible that challenges a previously held belief, application prompts us to surrender the false view to the true one. When we learn something about life we had never understood before, application leads us to surrender our ignorance to our new understanding. In application we take what we have learned from the Bible and willingly incorporate the new truth into our thinking, acting, and living.

Years ago, American men routinely received greetings from Uncle Sam. The letter they received informed them they were being drafted into the military, and needed to report for duty at a certain time and place. The letter demanded a response—a positive one. To ignore it would get a man into serious trouble. It did not matter that the man might not want to go, or that he had other plans; his will was subordinate to

American law. That letter represented the laws of our country and the authority behind them. In the same way, the Bible represents God's authority and his laws.

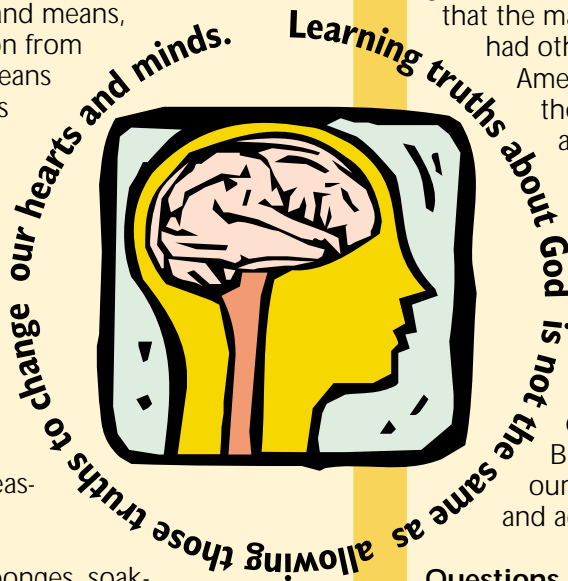
It would do no good for the man who had received his draft notice only to memorize it, or to explain what it meant to others. Unless he responded to that letter, he would be risking grave consequences. True application of the Bible leads to a surrender of many of our previously cherished ideas, beliefs, and activities.

## Questions to Ask

*What have I learned about God?* When we read and study the Bible, we often discover that God is different than we expected him to be.

The nature, heart, and passion of our God are written on every page of the Bible. He has left a detailed and intimate portrait of his will, his actions, and his love for us. Since the Bible is a book written from God to us, an important question we should ask ourselves is, "What have I learned about God that I didn't know before, or as well?"

How will the knowledge of God I have learned through my Bible study affect my relationship with him? Will it cause me to trust him more? Will it cause me to desire to know more



# to Transformation

## How to Make the Most of Your Bible Study

about him? Will it cause me to respect and honor him more? Will I be led to love him in a way I never thought possible?

*What did I learn about myself?* God knows us better than we know ourselves. His insight into our nature is far better than our own. We may think too highly of ourselves, or too lowly. We may have an inflated ego, or we may struggle with insecurity and low self-esteem. Often our feelings about ourselves come from the opinions of others. But when we study the Bible, we hear God speak about the true condition of our heart, mind, and soul.

After reading a passage of Scripture, we need to ask ourselves, "What view of myself did I have that this passage challenges?" This may be painful and difficult, but learning the truth about ourselves can be liberating.

Armed with this information, we can begin to make changes that will lead us closer to his truth, and further from self-deception. Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of England during World War II, once wrote, "Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened."

James warns, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does!" (James 1:22-25).

*What have I learned about the world?* Many of our values have been shaped by our culture. As we read the Bible, however, we discover that it challenges the underlying assumptions of our culture. The Bible speaks candidly about life and death, sexuality, financial integrity, and morality—issues on which our culture has strong opinions. When we come across new information in our study of the Bible, we should adjust our thinking, acting, and living to that new knowledge.

Do we need to be more cautious, or bolder? Do we need to be less fearful, or escape a

certain activity we may have embraced? Is there an issue in which we should become more involved as a result of what we have heard? Perhaps the Bible will reveal to us that we need to be less involved in something. We need to ask ourselves whether or not this new information we have learned from Scripture requires a minor, or even a major change in our daily thought or activity.

*Is there a promise for me to lean on, or act upon?* God makes hundreds of promises in the Old and New Testaments. While some of those promises are to specific groups of people, like Israel, others are for everyone. When in the course of your Bible reading you come upon a promise from God, ask yourself, "Is this promise for me? How will this promise affect my life?"

Few things can bring greater change in our hearts and lives than when we begin to take seriously the promises of God.

Books don't make promises; only people do. When we come across a promise from God, we are reminded that God is a person, not an impersonal force. He loves us and has wonderful plans for us, and to communicate his commitment to those plans, he states them in terms of promises.

*How will I apply these truths to my life?* We need divine assistance to apply truths from God's Word. The Christian life is a joint effort through which God helps us become the people he wants us to become. While we may want to change, without God's help, we will find it impossible.

God knows our weaknesses and he helps us make the necessary changes.

Unlike a teacher who gives us a letter grade to indicate how well we can demonstrate that we understood the material, God wants to transform our lives. Should we settle for anything less? ■

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