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Prioritize



What are some of your early experiences with the Bible?

QUESTION 1

God's Word must be central to our lives to truly serve Him.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

It took a drunk man to teach me a great truth about the Bible. I was at a men's Monday night Bible study, when we heard a beat-up old car screech into the church parking lot. A man was pushed out. He stumbled to the door and began to share about his struggles. Then he said to me, "You look like a preacher. Tell me what to do." At the time, I was a banker!

Since I didn't know how to respond, I randomly opened my Bible and began to read a psalm—one in which David asked God to kill his enemies! I cringed at every word. Then the guy interrupted, "That's what I need! I need Jesus!" Christ's name was not in the psalm. God's Word worked, in spite of my hasty verse selection. We sobered him up and led him to Christ. He joined the church and stayed focused on God's Word.

As they rebuilt Jerusalem's walls, Nehemiah and the Jewish people learned the importance of focusing on God's Word. Since God's Word was central to them, they had insight in how to serve Him.



WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Nehemiah 6:1-3,15-16 (CSB)

¹ When Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall and that no gap was left in it—though at that time I had not installed the doors in the city gates—² Sanballat and Geshem sent me a message: “Come, let’s meet together in the villages of the Ono Valley.” They were planning to harm me. ³ So I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing important work and cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?”

¹⁵ The wall was completed in fifty-two days, on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul. ¹⁶ When all our enemies heard this, all the surrounding nations were intimidated and lost their confidence, for they realized that this task had been accomplished by our God.

Great satisfaction typically accompanies the completion of a great task.

- » Walking the stage and receiving a diploma generates giant smiles.
- » Ending the season with a championship causes both athletes and fans to celebrate.
- » Removing the concrete barriers and orange barrels at the conclusion of a highway construction project certainly causes many to celebrate.

A celebration was close at hand for Nehemiah and the Jewish workers. They had almost finished rebuilding Jerusalem’s walls. The gaps were filled. All that remained was to install the doors in the city gates. Consider all they had accomplished: In addition to doing the physical construction, they had endured ridicule and threats from outside enemies. They overcame systemic problems within the Jewish community when wealthy Jews had taken advantage of poorer Jews. Now the finish line was within sight, and they simply needed to finish strong.

Unfortunately, their enemies made a final attempt to stop the completion of the walls, but this attack seemed more subtle than their others. Sanballat and Geshem sent Nehemiah a letter requesting a

What have you seen recently that could only have been attributed to God?

QUESTION 2

meeting. This letter was official and formal, and some might have viewed it as a concession, like when a losing politician congratulates the winner after a hard-fought campaign. Nehemiah knew better. The villages in the Ono Valley were a day away from Jerusalem, so the trip would remove him from the work for at least three days. And Nehemiah knew they had evil intent: "They were planning to harm me" (v. 2). These enemies could kidnap Nehemiah—or worse. They knew the Jews viewed Nehemiah as more than a project manager; he was their spiritual leader. Without Nehemiah, the people would be demoralized and work would cease.

Nehemiah recognized Sanballat and his cohorts for the enemies they were. He and they were all well aware their window of opportunity was closing. The work on the wall would soon be done. Once the gates were in place, only a siege would work to take the city, a move Sanballat was not likely to take. So Nehemiah stayed focused on the task of leading the final push to complete the wall.

After only fifty-two days, the wall was completed. When Nehemiah's enemies heard the news, they "were intimidated and lost their confidence" (v. 16). This was a complete reversal; the intimidators became the intimidated. Why? "They realized that this task had been accomplished by our God" (v. 16).

Great satisfaction typically accompanies the completion of a great task (v. 16). God's work pointed to Him and brought Him glory and recognition—even among their enemies.

Nehemiah 8:1-3 (CSB)

¹ All the people gathered together at the square in front of the Water Gate. They asked the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses that the LORD had given Israel. ² On the first day of the seventh month, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding. ³ While he was facing the square in front of the Water Gate, he read out of it from daybreak until noon before the men, the women, and those who could understand. All the people listened attentively to the book of the law.

Nehemiah did more than rebuild a wall; he wanted to rebuild the people spiritually. After the wall was completed, the people gathered at the square in front of the Water Gate. This area was on the east side of Jerusalem and at the center of city life. As the crowd gathered, they requested Ezra the priest to bring out God's Word and read it. Did you catch that? *The people* made the request. The leaders did not

Who has been instrumental in teaching you the importance of God's Word?

QUESTION 3

command the people to stand “from daybreak until noon” (v. 3) while the law was read; they saw the value for themselves in hearing God’s Word.

God’s Word has value for all of us.

- » **The Bible shows us God.** God has clearly revealed Himself in Scripture. God’s Word is sufficient to tell us all we need to know about Him. Nehemiah and the people knew where to find God. They opened up His Word!
- » **The Bible shows us how to live.** The Bible doesn’t just show us God; it also reveals who we are and who we can be in Christ. If God had inspired no written record, then we could not have any assurances of what He wants for us. The Bible is unlike any other book, and in it we discover a consistent and complete way to God’s will and all we need for a rich and full life in Christ.
- » **The Bible shows us how to live and serve together.** When we come to Christ, we come to His body, the church. Growing in that relationship, then, is something we do together. Churches that are the most focused on God’s Word will be the most unified. Ezra the priest brought out God’s Word before the whole assembly of people, and they listened with understanding (v. 2). They saw the value of listening and learning together.



Nehemiah 8:5-8 (CSB)

⁵ Ezra opened the book in full view of all the people, since he was elevated above everyone. As he opened it, all the people stood up. ⁶ Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and with their hands uplifted all the people said, "Amen, Amen!" Then they knelt low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. ⁷ Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah, who were Levites, explained the law to the people as they stood in their places. ⁸ They read out of the book of the law of God, translating and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was read.

Ezra and thirteen other men stood on a large wooden platform. Ezra "opened the book" (v. 5), or more technically, unrolled the scroll of God's Word. The Word of God led the people to worship, and their worship was both vocal and physical. They shouted, "Amen, Amen!" (v. 6), an expression of confirmation and agreement with God's Word. They lifted their hands and then "knelt low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground" (v. 6).

Verse 7 mentions thirteen other men—Levites—who "explained the law." They both translated and gave "the meaning so that the people could understand what was read" (v. 8). They went beyond just making sure the people *heard* God's Word; they also wanted the people to *understand* God's Word. We do not know exactly how this scene played out, but it appears the people may have gathered in small groups to study together.

Reading, studying, and understanding the Bible informs our worship. The more we know the Bible, the better we worship Jesus. Nehemiah and his people worshiped best when God's Word became central in their lives. We worship best when God's Word saturates every area of our lives.

What are some ways we can make the Word of God a bigger part of our day?

QUESTION 4

Why do you think it's important for us to study the Bible as a group and not just by ourselves?

QUESTION 5

"I will meditate on your precepts and think about your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word!"

PSALM 119:15-16

WORD OF GOD



In which area of life are you needing God's instruction and direction right now? Check all that apply.

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Work | <input type="checkbox"/> Family |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Relationships | <input type="checkbox"/> Church |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Decisions | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

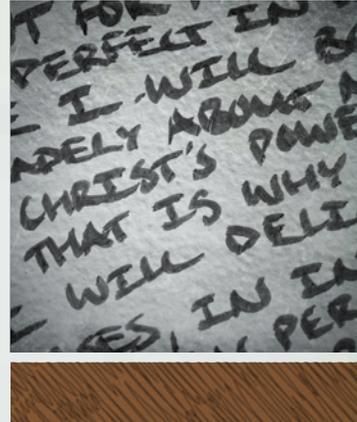
In the space below, rewrite Psalm 119:15-16 in your own words.

LIVE IT OUT

The man who stumbled into our men's Bible study began to learn God's Word. His attention was drawn to the Bible, and he started to understand God's plans for him. His life changed. You will not know what God wants for you unless you are studying Scripture regularly.

- » **Read.** Make the reading of God's Word a daily priority. Need a place to start? Check out a variety of Bible reading plans at Bible.com, SheReadsTruth.com, or HeReadsTruth.com.
- » **Memorize.** Hide God's Word in your heart through memorization. Memorize one or two verses a week that encourage you, challenge you, and help you draw closer to Christ. Apps such as ScriptureTyper.com can be used on your phone or tablet to help you memorize during the week.
- » **Invite.** Part of our spiritual growth includes growing with other believers as we study and worship together. Have a friend who isn't connected to a small-group Bible study? Extend an invitation for them to join your group.

God's Word must be central to your life in order to serve Him faithfully. **Cherish your time in the Word, and God will honor your efforts.**



My thoughts