



#TheGreatestBook

14 Day Devotional

Rediscovering God's Word



October 31, 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. In light of this significant anniversary, the five Fellowship Regions along with Fellowship National have designed an initiative entitled **#TheGreatestBook** that will draw Christians back into God's Word.

A 2013 Bible Engagement study discovered many Canadian Christians are not engaged in Bible reading or study, and there is a clear relationship between this and poor discipleship within the church community.

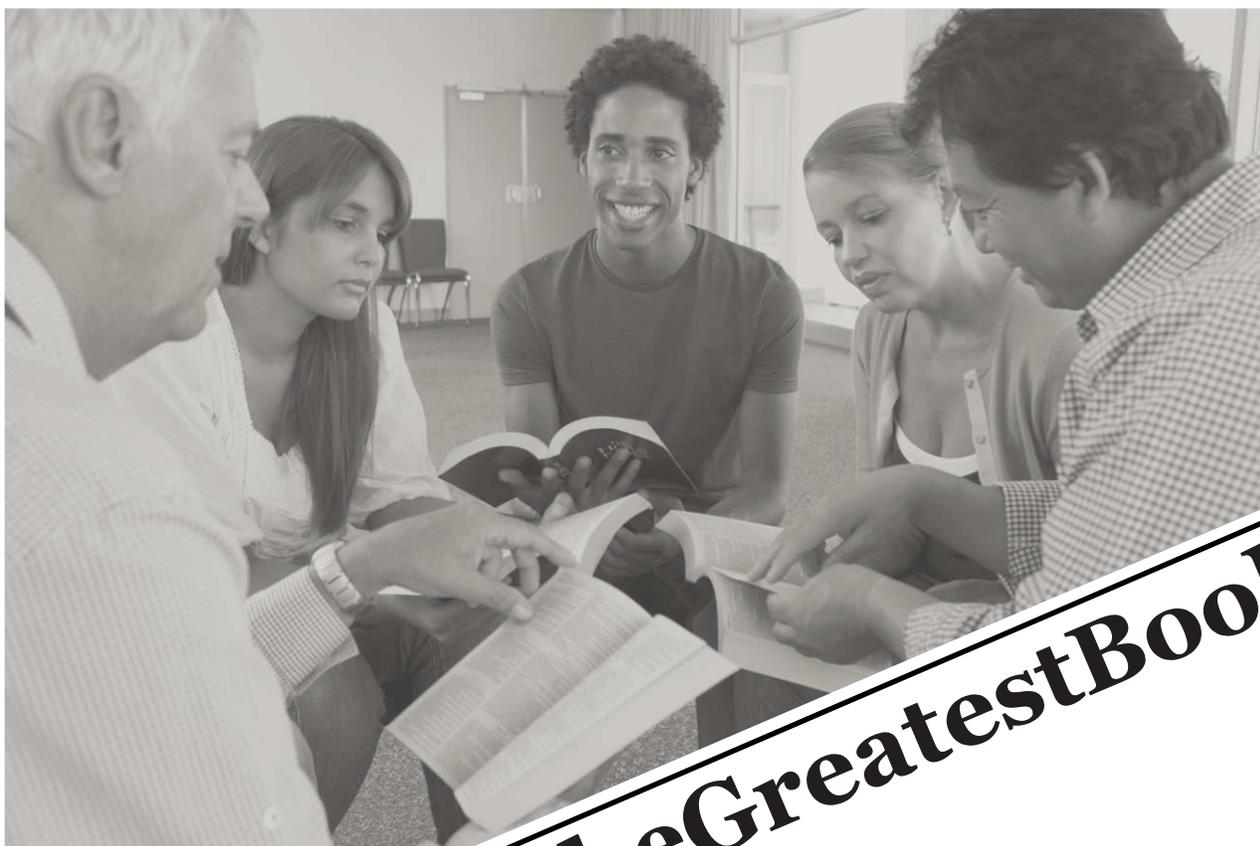
*The **#TheGreatestBook** series is a call to all Fellowship churches to spend 14 days together studying the Bible, celebrating the gift of God's Word and delighting in the joy of community.*

We would appreciate hearing how you or someone in your church family has been impacted through **#TheGreatestBook** series. Connect with us on Facebook or Twitter at **@FellowshipNatl** using the hashtag **#TheGreatestBook**.

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#TheGreatestBook

14 Day Devotional

Welcome to *#TheGreatestBook 14-Day Devotional*. It is our hope that over these next 14 days you will set aside a portion of time each day to read through the passage provided and the text presented for the day. Pray for the Lord to speak to you through what has been shared, and focus on His leading for ways you can apply in your life the lessons presented.

DAY 1 The Christian's Compass

TODAY'S READING: 2 Timothy 3:14-17 (NIV)

by Steve Jones

How did we get our Bible? Not where did you purchase your Bible, but how did God's Word come into our possession? Over 15 centuries, God spoke to 40 individuals, inspiring them to write and share the burden of His heart. With a holy hush they heard about creation, corruption and grace. When God had finished, the first tool in establishing His Word was complete. God's **Revelation** had occurred.

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it.”

—2 Timothy 3:14

God chose to deal with each of the 40 scribal authors as individuals. Job, a rich farmer, wrote in a different style than Amos, a poor farmer. The words of the highly educated Paul were a bit more complicated than the uneducated Peter. However, all who wrote carried with them the approval of Heaven itself. When the final scribe laid down their pen, the Angels of Heaven watched as their Sovereign completed the second tool in giving us His precious Word. **Inspiration** had occurred.

Soon many thousands joined the ranks of those original 40 and began their assigned task of taking God's Word to the whole world. Some were persecuted and others were killed for translating God's Word into their “mother tongue”. Untold millions were convinced in their hearts this was God's Word, and lives were saved and transformed. By what secret power did all this come into being? The answer is that the divine author of the Bible uses a third tool. **Illumination** continues to take place.

A man was packing for a trip and was asked if he was ready to go. He said, “Almost, just need a few things: a guide book, a lamp, a mirror, a hammer, book of poetry, a bundle of old letters, a sharp sword, hymn book and a compass.” His friend asked, “How you going to fit all that in your suitcase?” He smiled and pulled out his Bible. The purpose of a compass is to give the traveler the correct direction. If we were to draw spiritual lessons from the compass, we would discover that God's Word serves as a compass in the life of a Christian. From it we derive destination and direction in our lives.

The Christian's Compass gives DESTINATION (2 Timothy 3:15)

Paul reminds Timothy, saying, “You have been taught the Holy Scriptures from childhood and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus”.

Salvation is a gift from God. It revolutionizes a person's life and changes our eternal destiny. On our way to Heaven we should see changes in our lives along the way.

Then in 2 Timothy 3:16 the Bible states that: **The Christian's Compass gives DIRECTION (2 Timothy 3:16)** “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness...”

I do not like asking for directions. It makes me look like I don't know where I am going. The Apostle Paul provides three important reference points to ensure you are pointing your life toward Christ: doctrinal direction (vs. 16a), correctional direction (vs. 16b) and instructional direction (v.s 16c).

This is why God's Word should have a primary place in the life of a believer—to guide and transform our lives. The Christian's COMPASS gives direction, destination, and will be instrumental in helping us to become more like Christ. However, nothing will happen if your Bible remains on a book shelf collecting dust. Pick it up and read it today.

—Steve Jones serves as the President of Fellowship National. He is married to Marilyn, they have three grown children and two dogs (Shelties). He pastored previously in four Fellowship Churches over 25 years.

God's Word acts as the Christian's compass giving direction and a sure destination.

DAY 2 Running Naked into Battle

TODAY'S READING: Ephesians 6:10-18 (NIV)

by Matt Naismith

Soldiers never enter battle without armour.

Armour protects, defends and opposes that which comes against it.

In Ephesians 6:10-18, the apostle Paul implies that life for you and me in this world before resurrection, is like that of a battle; yet far too many of us are not wearing any armour.

Paul speaks of a battle that is not against flesh and blood, the things we see, but instead the things we don't see; the things going on in the unseen spiritual world. Think of it like standing on a beach and looking out over the water. What you see above the waves is what you and I see now but beneath the water there is a frenzy of activity; this is the place Paul says we must defend against.

So, what is the armour for our defence and battle?

1. **The belt of truth:** the things we know God has defined as right and wrong, opposed to the lies of Satan.
2. **The breastplate of righteousness:** right living with God.
3. **Gospel of peace on your feet:** Good News of Jesus' peace.
4. **Shield of faith:** believing God is who He says He is and has done what he said he has done.
5. **Helmet of salvation:** trusting in Jesus for your future and what he accomplished for you on the cross.
6. **Sword of the Spirit:** God's Word in the Scriptures.

With this armour we can battle and wage war effectively, but without them we are like soldiers running naked into an open battlefield, sinking in the sand of an ever-changing culture.

Consider the following:

- Are you armoured? Or in other words, are you living each day with the items listed above as part of your worldview and experience?
- How have you seen the battle rage and war in your life and in the lives of others in the unseen world?
- Why is armour so valuable and why do you think we avoid it?
- What is your prayer today regarding the above? Take five minutes to pray right now.
- If the above is true, how does it change the way you live?

—Matt Naismith is the Lead Pastor of Teaching and Scattered Life at Church of the City in Guelph, Ontario. He is married to Andrea and is the father of two sons, Nixon and Cade. Matt planted Church of the Ward (now Church of the City) in September 2013. Since then the church has grown and has become an independent and recognized church within the Fellowship.

“Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”
—Ephesians 6:11

The armor of God provides everything we need so we are able to stand firm in a culture of sinking sand.

DAY 3 Truth that Leads to Godliness

TODAY'S READING: Titus 1:1 (NIV)

by Jeff Germo

It's easy to call ourselves "Christian" because we believe certain truths from God's Word about who Jesus is and what He accomplished for us on the cross. Anyone can do that. James said even the demons intellectually know who God is. True belief, however, will always lead to action. A disciple of Jesus is one who follows and learns from Him. A disciple of Jesus will allow the Holy Spirit to probe his or her heart and root out those things that hinder their relationship with God or with people. Paul, to Titus wrote,

"Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness ..."

—Titus 1:1

"Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness." (Titus 1:1 - ESV)

The NIV says, "the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness." The NLT says, "I have been sent to proclaim faith to those God has chosen and to teach them to know the truth that shows them how to live godly lives."

The goal of the disciple of Jesus is not simply to learn more about Jesus. Our goal as disciples of Jesus is to get to know Him so intimately that we become like Him in character. We take on more of the fruit of the Spirit as Paul described in Galatians 5:22-23: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Jesus said in John 13:34-35 that when those outside the walls of the church look at us they should see, more than anything, that we love each other. That will draw them to Him and they, in turn, will be changed by Him. His love is transformational. He will change us if we let Him.

We, and others, especially those closest to us, should be able to notice change in us from year to year. Next year at this time, my wife, Ruthie, should be able to say confidently that I am more loving, patient and kind than I was the year before. If there is no noticeable positive change it means I am not allowing the Holy Spirit to do His work in my heart.

James said, "For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror." (James 1:23 - ESV)

One of the saddest stories I know is from my early years in ministry. I witnessed an elderly lady throw a temper tantrum in the church. I invited her into my office and asked her if she thought her behaviour exemplified the character of Jesus. She said, "No, but I've been like this all my life. It's just me, and I'm too old to change." That broke my heart, but worse, I believe it broke the heart of God. When we do not allow Him to change us we are denying the power of the cross. Jesus will change us if we let Him. He actually calls out to us to allow Him to change us.

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30 - ESV)

Are you tired of trying on your own? Are you tired of living under the heavy yoke of the law? Come to Jesus and learn from Him. Allow Him to work a change in your heart. He is gentle and humble and wants to give you rest.

—Jeff Germo has been married to Ruthie for almost 30 years. They reside in beautiful Campbell River, BC, where he is lead pastor at Campbell River Baptist Church. Aside from the joy of partnering with Jesus in His Kingdom work, Jeff enjoys capturing the beauty of God's creation with his camera.

God's Word, rightly applied, leads to a character transformation in the image of Jesus.

DAY 4 Looking for Meaning and Purpose

TODAY'S READING: James 1:5 (NIV)

by Garry Francis

The Book of Ecclesiastes portrays the emptiness, perplexity and complexity of life apart from God. It's a "wisdom" book; you're probably thinking, "You've got to be kidding!" For years the last place I would go to find wisdom regarding my relationship with God is to the book of Ecclesiastes. After a casual reading of chapter 1 the reader will notice that it begins with emptiness and ends with pain ... enough to depress the most joyful Christ follower. If you decide to keep reading, chapter 2 doesn't get any better. In fact the more one reads on into the book the more one comes to realize that Solomon is on to something and he may be right! Most of us are just not willing to "admit it!"

"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."

—James 1:5

The author (Solomon) as far as I'm concerned had life made in the shade! He was the wisest, richest and most influential king in Israel's history. Yet he declares that life as he knew it was empty! Solomon's power, popularity, prestige and pleasure didn't cut it. Solomon couldn't find meaning and purpose with all of his P's lined up! He was drifting, searching, alone in the winter of his life with few answers! He had all the advantages yet he is pictured in a sad and dark place.

The wisdom in this incredible book can be found in some of the questions that Solomon asks. Upon further reflection ... this book has hidden gems of wisdom masked in the search for meaning.

We find the "human condition" and the "human experience" intertwined in this profound book. I admit that I find myself asking the very same questions that Solomon asked hundreds of years ago. Can any one of us raise our hand and say that we've never asked or thought about deep, dark and problematic questions about the meaning and purpose of our lives?

Solomon begins the book with a question: "What advantage does man have in all of his work which he does under the sun?" I'm willing to come clean and admit publically that I've asked that same question many times. I don't use the exact words or phrases that Solomon used, however the essence of my question is, "Why am I here? What is the meaning and purpose of my life?"

In chapter 2:12, there is another profound question we've all asked: "Why am I on this treadmill? Why would anyone get on this treadmill in the first place?" In chapter 3:22, yet another complex question that sums up our human condition and experience: "What will tomorrow bring?" Solomon wished he could control the events of his tomorrow. We all wish we could control what happens tomorrow; however we're all left hanging with the same question unanswered in our hearts. I don't know what tomorrow holds and why can't I figure it out?

Cruising into chapter 3 of the book Solomon starts to refer to "God" more and more. In the first two chapters God is barely mentioned at all, however "I" is mentioned numerous times. The wisdom in the book is ... life is empty apart from God when it's all about me; however life has meaning and purpose when God is part of the equation. In fact, chapter 3 clearly states that God is in charge! The last word is given to God in the book. Solomon recommends that we, "fear God and keep his commandments!" (12:13).

Realize that when we're in the driver's seat of our lives the end is bleak! Solomon describes it this way: I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labour which I had exerted ... behold all was empty and striving after the wind and there was no profit under the sun. (2:11).

I invite you to go get your Bible and start reading this fascinating book with a new set of eyes. Stop and reflect upon the questions and gain wisdom. Admit that you have indeed asked the same questions! Ask God for wisdom just as the book of James (James 1:5) instructs us. Life is truly meaningful when we partner with God!

—Garry Francis serves with Fellowship Chaplaincy as a partner chaplain with the Toronto Police Service (Divisional chaplain) and is also the chaplain of Whitby Fire and Emergency Services. He is married to Sandra and is the proud father of two adult children, Timothy and Angelica.

Life is full of meaning and purpose in partnership "with" God.

DAY 5 Hearing and Receiving God's Word

TODAY'S READING: James 1:22-25 (NIV)

by Bob Flemming

In his book, 'Loving God' Chuck Colson said this: "More widely read, more frequently attacked than any other book in history, generations of individuals have attempted to discredit it; dictators of every age have outlawed it and executed those who read it. Yet, soldiers carry it into battle believing it more powerful than their weapons. Fragments of it smuggled into solitary prison cells have transformed ruthless killers into gentle saints. Pieced-together scraps of Scripture have converted whole villages of pagans.

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."

—James 1:22

"Literary classics endure centuries. Philosophers mold the thoughts of generations unborn. Modern media shapes current culture. *Yet nothing has affected the rise and fall of civilization, the character of cultures, the structures of governments, and the lives of inhabitants of this planet as profoundly as the words of the Bible.*"

The key, of course, to all this transformation and reformation is reception. Not just hearing the Word or being around the Word, but attentively listening to it, absorbing it, and putting it into practice. Over 20 times in the NT Jesus says; "He who has an ear to hear, let him hear." It's the hearing that makes the difference!

In James 1:19-27 we are given three encouragements to hear and receive God's Word.

1. Develop an Attentive Heart (James 1:19-21a)

"Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry", James says. In today's age of cell phones, twitter, Facebook, emails, and texting, we're so busy speaking and listening to each other that we don't take the time to listen to God. Listening to God means disconnecting and going 'off the grid' so we can actually hear His voice through the quiet times that we have in His Word. "Get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent" means we must confess and 'shed' ourselves of our sins, which block our reception. Purity of heart is the best preparation for hearing and receiving God's Word.

2. Develop a Teachable Heart (James 1:21b)

"Humbly accept the Word planted in you, which can save you" emphasizes an attitude of brokenness and submission. Like a domesticated animal whose stubborn will has been broken, we must, in all humility, bow to what the Lord is saying to us through His Word. It was A.W. Tozer who said: "Humility is as scarce as an albino robin!"

3. Develop an Obedient Heart (James 1:22-25)

"Do what it says" is James's theme in these verses. James uses the illustration of a mirror to emphasize the fact that obedience should be plainly obvious. His point, if I may paraphrase is, 'what good is a mirror if you're not prepared to adjust yourself in response to what you see!' Like looking in a mirror, there is first contemplation and then action, so it should be with our response to the Word. We've all heard the story of the bodybuilder showing off his physique to the tribal chief. After flexing all his muscles in many different poses, the chief asked the bodybuilder, "What else do you do with all those muscles?" "Well", the bodybuilder said, "that's pretty much it. I work out to pose." And the chief said, "What a waste. What a waste." Many Christians work out only to pose. They carry their Bibles, they listen to sermons, only to leave the church and never to use what they've learned.

—Bob Flemming serves as Regional Director for FEB Central. He is married to Rhonda and has two married daughters and two grandchildren. He previously pastored Springvale Baptist Church for 28 years.

People who properly hear and receive God's Word are transformed and changed into Christ's image.

DAY 6 It's a Heart Thing

TODAY'S READING: Psalm 119:9-16 (NIV)

by Lynda Schultz

I love the push-and-pull conversations between Jesus and the religious leaders of His day. In Matthew 15, the discussion started with the subject of hand-washing and quickly went (at least from the record we have) to heart issues, beginning with this critical statement: *“These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me”* (Matthew 15:8).

“I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands.”

—Psalm 119:10

The religious leaders suffered from the same problem we often have—we know a lot, but what's in the head hasn't filtered down to our hearts where it can change our lives. That's why Psalm 119:11 DOESN'T say, “I have hidden your word in my head that I might not sin against you.”

Unless the Word of God gets beyond our heads it will always remain something we quote, something we know, but never something we live. It's cold intellectualism (head) versus the “core of our being” (heart).

Alexander MacLaren, a great Baptist expositor of the nineteenth century, said,

“...the Old Testament use of the word 'heart' is much wider than our modern one, which limits it to being the seat and organ of love, affection, or emotion; whereas in the Old Testament the 'heart' is the very vital centre of the personal self....And so, when the Psalmist says, 'I have hid Thy word within my heart,' he means 'I have buried it deep in the very midst of my being, and put it down at the very roots of myself, and there incorporated it with the very substance of my soul.'”

Living out the Word of God (a.k.a. obedience to Christ) involves engaging the heart.

“I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”

John Gill states, “The Word of God is a most powerful antidote against sin, when it has a place in the heart; not only the precepts of it forbid sin, but the promises of it influence and engage to purity of heart and life, and to the perfecting of holiness in the fear of the Lord; and all the doctrines of grace in it effectually teach the saints to deny all sin and worldly lusts, and to live a holy life and conversation.”

The psalmist “got it.” He sought the Lord with all his heart (119:10). He embraced the Word with all his emotions (119:11). He asked God to teach him (119:12) and to keep him from straying from the path laid out by the Word (119:10). He taught what he had learned personally from the Word (119:13). Following the Word was the greatest treasure of his life (119:14). He thought about the Word constantly (119:15). He did not neglect the Word (119:16) but took pleasure in learning from it.

These are the characteristics of one who has gone far beyond simply knowing information and whose “heart” is truly fully engaged in following the Lord. They answer the question with which this section of the psalm begins: *“How can a young man [I] keep his [my] way pure?”*

Sound advice for every one of us.

—Lynda Schultz is a former Fellowship International missionary to Colombia and Venezuela and also was on staff at the Fellowship National office. Lynda has served on staff with several Fellowship churches in Ontario as Director of Christian Education and is a published author.

To be truly learned, the Word of God must be daily lived out.

DAY 7 God's Call

TODAY'S READING: Romans 1:1-7 (NIV)

by Steve Adams

I'm old enough to say that it was very different when I was a kid growing up. There was no internet, no personal computers and no video games. Hard to imagine for some I know! We did have television. We even had three channels to choose from! But it was pretty much reserved for family time in the evenings. Growing up in a rural neighbourhood in Nova Scotia in the 1960s, we spent generous amounts of time outside. The fields and the woods were our playground. It wasn't unusual for us to head out in the morning and just go. And of course, in those days, there were no cell phones either, so if you were wanted for something, someone had to come find you. I can remember many occasions when our dad would walk to the corner of the field, or somewhere we had last been sighted, cup his hands together and holler for us to come. And we would hear him calling us. Maybe it was to go somewhere, maybe we had company, or maybe it was supertime! Whatever it was, it was a beautiful sound.

My dad has been gone for 26 years now. But it is a testimony to the personal nature of God, and of His care and interest in us, that He calls us. Think about it! It would be a mammoth task to go through the Scriptures and consider all the instances where we see this. It's everywhere. It starts with Adam in the garden and it just goes on from there God calling Noah to build an ark ... God calling Abram to a land He would show him And of course we come into the NT and there is Jesus calling people to follow Him.

In the introduction of his letter to the church at Rome, Paul uses the word 'called' several times. The implications are profoundly significant. God is a lot of things. He is holy and just and merciful and mighty. He is eternal and infinite. He is also a Person who wants a relationship with us. And that is why He has given us His Word, so that we might know Him. To Him, and to us, this is all intensely personal.

So, He calls us. He calls us to belong to Him (vs. 1 and vs. 6), to be like Him (vs. 7), and to represent Him on mission in the world (vs. 1). God beckons us to be reconciled to Him through the grace that is found in Christ, and when we respond in faith and obey that call, we find ourselves not only reconciled, but ambassadors pleading with others on His behalf with that same gospel (2 Corinthians 5:18). It is both a call to come and a call to go; to come to Him and to go for Him. And sandwiched in between the two, it is a call to be changed. Because it is impossible to really know Him without being profoundly changed by Him. As they say, "God loves me right the way I am, but too much to leave me that way."

All of this is a calling to relationship. He wants to be a Father to us like no other, and He has made a way at great personal cost (vs. 4 and vs. 7). How have you responded to the call of God upon your life? This isn't religion. This is relationship. He speaks. We have His Word. It's intensely personal. It tells us of the Son who died and rose again; our Lord, come for us (vs. 3 and vs. 4).

He is calling right now. Are we listening? The Jewish Shema begins "Hear, O Israel ...". Jesus says, "My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me" (John 10:27). "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." (Matthew 11:15) Why? Because God is calling. He has come to find us. He wants us.

—Steve is lead pastor of Faith Baptist Church, Great Village, NS, where he has served joyfully in that role for the past 28 years. He and his wife Florence have three grown children and six grandchildren.

"Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake."

—Romans 1:5

God wants us.

DAY 8 Beholding God's Word

TODAY'S READING: 2 Corinthians 3:18 (NIV)

by Jenn Martin

We are what we behold! It's true, where we spend our time, how we fill our days, what we gaze upon gives witness to what we believe is important and matters most in our lives—whether we realize it or not.

The definition of behold means to consider, to gaze upon, or to observe something, with the root word 'hold' implying for an extended period of time. Beholding can also mean to contemplate or reflect. Similar to our reflection in a mirror, our lives can reflect what we behold. The problem is that too often our reflection—or what we behold—illuminates our own desires or our own ambitions and reflects only what we want. And, if we look closely, at times reflecting the pursuit of our own glory. What if a mirror was held up to our lives today? What would it reflect? What would it reveal?

In 2 Corinthians 3:18, “beholding the glory of the Lord” means to see the glory of the Lord, first, so that we can reflect back His glory in and through our lives and be transformed. In other words, we can be the reflection of God's glory shining in us. It is what changes us into Christ's image and gives direction and purpose to our lives. Furthermore, this verse clearly reveals that our earthly and eternal life purpose is to glorify God through a transformed life by reflecting (beholding) His glory. In fact, that's my life purpose statement that can be distinctly observed and applied to each one of my days.

As God's redeemed children, we have been transformed from death to life in Christ, and we can live “being transformed” daily, by deepening our likeness to Christ, one degree at a time, by reflecting God's glory. God has purposefully unveiled our faces to give us access to His glory and character so that He can reveal Himself in and through our lives. But He doesn't expect us to do this apart from Him or by living distracted in pursuit of our own comforts, pleasures or glory.

Through Scripture alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, all to the glory of God alone—we can live being transformed and reflecting the glory of the Lord, from one degree of glory to another. Like Moses, who wanted to see the glory of the Lord (Exodus 33), we can see God's glory by daily positioning ourselves to see God's goodness, greatness and presence available to us through the written Word. To see the glory of the Lord we have to look to Scripture—it reveals God's glory. God's Word resources us to live a life that reflects Christ and is something to behold. Let's hold the mirror closely. If we want to behold the glory of the Lord and live a transformed life, we need to ask ourselves:

- Am I being a good steward of the Word by approaching and prioritizing it, daily? (Lamentations 3:22-23; 1 Timothy 4:7-10)
- Am I intentionally being equipped, letting the Word of Christ dwell richly in me? (Colossians 3:16; Matthew 7:24)
- Am I renewing my mind through the written Word and living in view of who God is for His glory? (Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 10:31)
- Am I discerning the Word and asking for wisdom and understanding? (Hebrews 5:11-14; James 1:4-8)
- Am I reflecting God's Word back to Him in prayer? (Ephesians 3:14-21; 6:17-21; Nehemiah 1:4-11)

God's Word is the mirror that redirects our heart's reflection from ourselves to that of Christ's reflection. To what degree are you beholding God's Word to reflect the glory of the Lord, transforming your life?

—Jenn is a speaker, women's ministry leader and gospel-centered life coach, and currently serves as the Director of FEB Central Women's Ministry as well as in her personal ministry Live Simple. When she doesn't have a book in her hand—or even when she does—Jenn loves spending time with her husband, Greg, and three children still at home. She attends Calvary Baptist Church in Oshawa, Ontario.

“And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”
—2 Corinthians 3:18

God's Word resources us to live a life that reflects Christ and is something to behold.

DAY 9 Why the Word?

TODAY'S READING: Ephesians 6:10-13 (NIV)

by Rick Buck

There are many word pictures the Bible uses to describe the Christian life, one of which is the imagery of spiritual warfare. As followers of Christ we are in a spiritual battle - a battle for our minds and souls. But we can't fight this battle on our own; we can only win if we use the right weapons.

The Word of God, the Book, is our critical weapon to be successful in the Christian life. It alone can vanquish the power of the evil one. Without the Word there is no power to be victorious.

In Ephesians, chapter 6, Paul describes how believers need to equip themselves to fight a spiritual battle. The equipment of the spiritual soldier includes many pieces of armour, but none is more important than the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. It is both defensive and offensive. There were two swords that the Roman soldier would use in battle. The sword Paul refers to here is the machaira, the shorter straight sword (6-18 inches) used in hand-to-hand combat. It was always ready at hand to use. This is what Paul uses as a word picture for the role of God's Word in our lives. The sword is not just any word but God's Word, the product of His character through the Holy Spirit. The Bible is not just any book, but the Book of books because it is unique in that it originated from the very breath of the Spirit of God. That the Bible is the product of God's power through His Spirit helps us to understand why Paul describes it as a spiritual sword. It possesses intrinsic power because it is attended by the Spirit's presence ("sword of the Spirit"). This means that it can change us from the inside out. The Word of God slices through the human spirit like a hot knife through butter. It wounds, but in a positive way, like a surgical knife, convicting us and turning us to God.

Here is the secret to the Scriptures and why they are so important. The Word of God reveals God's will and heart towards us and is effective to change our will and our hearts. Satan can't stand against God's truth, because he can't stand against God. That is why one of Satan's fundamental goals is to either keep us from hearing God's Word or confusing us about what God has said. The evil one wants us to create and choose our own road map for living.

So if the Bible is essential for this battle we find ourselves in, then the question is how do we wield the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God? How do we make sure that the Word is our roadmap, our instruction manual, and our authority for every decision?

First, we need to **come under** the Word of God. It is through hearing and receiving God's Word from spiritual shepherds that the Spirit of God forms us into the likeness of Christ. Come to church ready to listen and hear what God is saying through the teaching and preaching of the Word.

And second, we need to **get into** the Word of God. Practically, this means reading, studying and memorizing the Scriptures for ourselves. C.H. Spurgeon said, "A Bible which is falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn't".

We need to go beyond reading, studying and memorizing. In Psalm 1 the author writes, "Blessed is the person who delights in the law of the Lord and on his law he or she meditates day and night." We need to go deeper in the Word by sustained reflection on its truths. We need to let the Word saturate our souls. Only then will we be equipped to fight and win the battle we are in for our souls and minds.

—Rick Buck has been Lead Pastor at Emmanuel in Barrie, Ontario for 20 years. He and his wife Jo have two grown children and three grandchildren.

"Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand."

—Ephesians 6:11

God's Word is the key to winning in the spiritual life.

DAY 10 The Value of God's Word

TODAY'S READING: Psalm 119:72 (NIV)

by Darryl Dash

I was shocked to discover the cost of a New Testament epistle. According to scholars, the apostle Paul would have spent \$3,000 in today's dollars for the materials to write the book of Romans.

It wasn't the only cost. Later, scribes invested hours copying each word. 5,686 Greek manuscripts survive today out of the tens of thousands that existed. Each one cost time and money.

The greatest cost isn't measured in money or time, but in lives. In 1536, William Tyndale, a Bible translator, was strangled to death and burned at the stake in England. His crime: he translated the Bible into English. More recently, four Bible translators were martyred in March 2016 when militants raided their Middle Eastern office. The remaining translators stayed, and are translating the Bible into eight languages.

You can buy a Bible for \$10. The price tag doesn't begin to describe the true cost or value of God's Word.

Why have so many resources and lives been devoted to preserve, translate, and spread Scripture? It's because of the inherent value of the Word of God. In Psalm 119:72, David wrote: *"The law from your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces."*

David is beside himself as he describes his delight in God's Word. He talks about Scripture being worth more to him than gold or the spoils of war. He talks about Scripture as his joy and the love of his heart.

According to David, your most valuable possession isn't your house, your car, artwork, or jewelry. Your most valuable possession is Scripture. No matter what you buy, you will never own anything that's worth more.

"Many things about the Bible can be exaggerated, but not its importance," says John Piper. "It is impossible to exaggerate the worth of God's Word. It is an infinite worth."

Scripture is valuable for many reasons. It's God's Word to us. It's trustworthy. It's how we know about Jesus. It reveals God's will for us. It nourishes us. It gives us everything we need to know for salvation, and for obeying God. It's useful in our fight against the evil one.

Do you recognize its value in your life? Let's ask God to grant us hearts that value His Word. One of Satan's greatest strategies is to get us to devalue Scripture. He knows that a low view of Scripture will lead to a low view of God. Let's also act on its value. Open it daily. Treasure it. Pray over it. Memorize it. Listen to preaching with great expectation.

There's nothing more valuable than God's Word.

—Darryl Dash is a church planter in Liberty Village, Toronto, and director of the Advance Church Planting Institute. He is married to Charlene and they have two children—Christina and Josiah. He blogs at www.DashHouse.com.

"The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold."

—Psalm 119:72

**God's Word is the most valuable possession
you will ever own.**

DAY 11 Heirloom DNA

TODAY'S READING: 1 Peter 1:23-25 (NIV)

by Kathy Mawhorter

There is a segment of the horticultural community that is committed to preserving heirloom seeds and plants and I'm thankful they do. An heirloom seed is seed from a plant that has been passed from one generation to another, carefully grown and saved because it is considered valuable. Many heirlooms have been grown, saved and passed down for more than 100 years. Some have history reaching back 300 plus years. There is much talk in the food realm of staying away from GMOs and eating organic, untainted produce. The grocery store's Red Delicious apples of today are certainly better looking than they used to be, but don't taste better. I would be happier with a bumpy, juicy, crisp heirloom apple any day.

God's Word, His living Word, is the heirloom seed for our spiritual sustenance. It's amazing to me to have a book (or collection of books) that has stood the test of time and has remained as current and relevant today as when it was written. Scholars have kept His words true to current language while God's Word and its message has endured the centuries. There aren't many books I would reread, even books I've really enjoyed. But God's Word is new every morning. The brilliance, diversity, complexity *and* simplicity of His Word will never be fully understood by the human mind. And that is why we can read the Bible every day for years and still benefit from the heirloom DNA displayed in this marvellous book.

1 Peter 2 then begins with the word, "therefore", and lists some things we should get rid of and some things we should do. "Therefore" should be our go to word whenever we spend time in God's living, enduring Word. Therefore, how shall I conduct my day? Is God trying to instruct, direct, encourage, challenge or rebuke? We don't have a lot of control over how we benefit from eating an apple, but we do have the privilege of choosing engagement with and application of God's Word for our spiritual development.

Just as we eat apples not only for the taste but also for the nutrition, so should we spend time with God for the relationship that leads to the outworking of our lives. What an amazing heritage it is to have God's living, enduring Word at our fingertips!

So this fall, why not curl up with a crunchy, juicy apple (maybe even an heirloom apple) **and** God's Word? As you do, may you be sustained, encouraged, challenged as you move forward in hope ... and always say, "therefore".

—Kathy Mawhorter and her husband Mike have served in Fellowship churches in Ontario and British Columbia since 1981. They are currently at Ladner Baptist, Ladner, BC and have the joy of serving alongside some of their four married children and their spouses. Eight of their 15 grandchildren live within a few blocks so Kathy gets to play Grandma on a regular basis.

"For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God."

—1 Peter 1:23

God's Word sustains, encourages and challenges us.

DAY 12 “May I have a word with you?”

TODAY'S READING: John 4:39-42 (NIV)

by Julianne August

Lung Cancer. Those two words hung in the air like thick fog and for a few minutes everything seemed a blur. My dad had lung cancer and the prognosis was not good. Almost immediately I began to wrestle intensely with the reality of eternal life and death. In those moments I knew it was time to push through fear and share my faith.

Perhaps you have felt that lump in your throat and choking fear rising up out of nowhere when you find yourself in a room with people you love dearly, but can't seem to utter a word about the God you love so desperately. You want to speak and you want to tell yet you recognize the subtle signs of the intolerant and the facial expressions of the disinterested. Perhaps you have experienced the debates or abrupt change of subject and go silent, walking out the door after another visit wondering why it has to be so hard. For many years this has been my reality and I wonder if you know this reality too?

I began to take baby steps, speaking simple truths, expressing my faith in ways that were genuine. To my surprise as I pushed through the initial fear it became more comfortable. The resistance remained yet I persevered — not in my own strength but in the power that I knew the Gospel held. It is the power of salvation for those who believe. I became relentless in sharing the Jesus I knew and loved and the grace upon grace I have received. I began praying the truths of Scripture over the lives of the people closest to me and in particular my dad.

One day I was reading in the Gospel of John the story of the Samaritan woman at the well. I got lost in the beauty of the story: Jesus revealing Himself, her eyes being opened and her enthusiasm to go and tell an entire village about Jesus. It resulted in numerous Samaritans from her village believing in and trusting in Christ because of what the woman said when she declared and testified, "Come see a man who told me all that I ever did." To be honest I could see myself in the story. It was wonderfully affirming to think I had taken the risk and boldly shared my faith time and time again with my father. But what happened in the verses following left me speechless and has forever changed me.

Jesus remained in that village for two days and Scripture tells us, “many more believed because of His Word.” Did you catch that? They believed because of *His Word*—His personal message to them. They told the woman they no longer believed just because of what she said; they heard Jesus personally, and they knew He truly was the Saviour of the world, the Christ. **The testimony of our words shines the light on Christ but the power of His Word is the light that illuminates the way.**

With clarity from Scripture, I knew I had to get a copy of God's Word into my dad's hands. Like the Samaritan woman, even though I testified well I knew Jesus desired to reveal Himself to my dad personally. That very day I took him a Bible, placed it in his hands, trusting it would penetrate his heart, and praying it would be the catalyst for my dad to receive Christ, and become a child of God at 81 years of age. And he did. Jesus revealed Himself as the way, the truth and the life. Before my father died he gave his life to Christ.

The Samaritan woman believed and then told, but others had to hear from Jesus for themselves. Today we hear from Jesus and know Him through the Bible. Who in your circle of influence needs a copy of the Word of God today? Pray about the hands and hearts that need the truth of His Word.

—Julianne has served on staff at Compass Community Church in Orangeville since 2006 as Director of Community Life. She has also served on National Council and the FEB Central Board. Julianne is married to Paul and they have two young adult sons.

“They said to the woman, ‘We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.’”

—John 4:42

When we put the Bible into someone's hands Jesus can speak to the heart.

DAY 13 The Living Word

TODAY'S READING: Hebrews 4:12 (NIV)

by John Tedford

Burn a Bible—we shrug. Use the pages as wrapping paper or toilet paper—we sigh. It doesn't seem to matter to Christendom what you do with our printed Scriptures. The sacredness of the Christian's Holy Book comes not from the ink and paper used, not from the physical words—be they Greek or Hebrew or Aramaic or English or Urdu or Arabic, and not from any physical or earthly properties, but from the reality that they are the living Words of the living God, the Creator of heaven and earth. Do whatever you want to the written page, God's Word won't disappear!

God being God, the only true God, the Creator, the Source of all life, and Sustainer of all life, brought forth life by His Word. He spoke and life sprang into existence. His purpose was to glorify Himself by the existence of life, so His creation reflects His nature. Although His creation reveals His nature, humans who are lost and dead because of sin, required more revelation than creation to bring us back to a state of life. So God in His grace gave us His written Word. Life to bring life.

People say to me, “I am not going to line my life up with something that was written 2,000 to 3,000 years ago by men who are long dead!” If the words in the Bible contained are the words of men who are now long dead, I would agree wholeheartedly, BUT the Bible contains the Words of a God who is very much alive and therefore those Words are alive!

We know God is alive because we see His activity everywhere in creation, and we sense His Presence. We know His Word is alive because we see its activity in people's lives, and we see His Presence in its pages. Why do the lyrics of songs written 3,000 years ago in an archaic language that were put to music long lost, still speak into the hearts of modern people like us? Because the Psalms are the living Word of a living God and He shows Himself to us in those lyrics! Why do adults who have been living destructive lives, suddenly begin to live in ways that benefit themselves, their families and their communities? In ways that glorify their Creator? Because they discover that the Words contained in the Scriptures bring life, and bring it to abundance!

Moses told the Israelites these Words are life (Deuteronomy 32:47), the Lord Jesus told Satan that these Words are life (Matthew 4:4) and Peter declared that Jesus had the Words of eternal life (John 6:68). John tells us that Jesus is the Word — which taken literally means that Jesus is Scripture come to life, and also means that the Word of God (the speech of God) is the second person of the Trinity. The writer to the Hebrews declares that the Word of God is living and active.

God established Scripture, God made it alive, God gave it authority, and God will defend Scripture. The printed words on the pages of our Bibles by themselves are just words, but combined with the work of the Holy Spirit, they become alive and bring life to all who obey. The Bible calls those who say there is no God “fools” but our Lord called those of us who read the Scripture but don't obey it “fools”. So friend, let us open our Bibles in whatever language we speak — let us bow before the living God, and ask Him to open our minds that we might discover the meaning, to open our hearts that we might decide to obey, and to open our eyes that we might see Him as He truly is!

—John Tedford serves as Senior Pastor at Parkdale Baptist in Belleville, Ontario. He and his wife Wanda have seven children, with three still living at home.

“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”

—Hebrews 4:12

The Bible brings LIFE to any who would obey it.

DAY 14 God First

TODAY'S READING: 1 Corinthians 7:29-35 (NIV)

by Mark Breitreuz

"We often hear the phrase 'God first, family second' in church circles. While we say it a lot, I don't see how this phrase is actually impacting anyone. Think about it. What if you were to switch to a 'family first' mentality? What actions would you really have to change?"

—Francis Chan

"I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord."

—1 Corinthians 7:35

In this passage I've chosen, we are reminded by Paul that time is short. There are many distractions – even good things: from the blessings of material things from God, to our spouses. Paul then says we should be on guard – not so that we're restricted, rather, that our loyalty to the Lord would remain first and foremost.

I would encourage you to take on the challenge from Francis Chan in the context of our Bible reading, as a practical example.

I, too, would declare, "God first, family second". Does God get first place or second place to my family when it comes to my quiet time? Fittingly enough, we're focusing on the significance and importance of God's Word.

And while I'd say I'm pretty good regarding my time with the Lord, I looked at it from this vantage point: "Would there be family situations/circumstances that from time to time would disrupt or displace my quiet time?" The answer is yes – although far from regularly, it can happen. Then I asked myself, "Would there be times in my day where I would disrupt family time, and interrupt a 'scheduled family event' to carve some time away with the Lord?" The answer is no. My kids, for example, would not be mid-sentence at the supper table telling me about their days, when I'd interrupt them and say, "tell me later, I'm going to read my Bible and pray".

It seems silly to consider interrupting our kids that way. Yet we can be in mid-conversation with the Lord, and a distraction can have us "leave the table". Or worse yet, intercept our time that is normally spent with Him, altogether.

In lives with numerous "seconds" vying for first place; may you spend some time right now evaluating whether God is actually first in practice, or word only.

—Mark Breitreuz is the Regional Director for Fellowship Prairies. He's married to his High School sweetheart, Andrea, and they've been blessed with two amazing kids, Natalia and Ethan.

**An undivided devotion to the Lord helps us
keep Him first in our lives.**

A few final thoughts...

Sola Scriptura

by François Turcotte

As we mark the anniversary of the Reformation, it is good for us to reflect on the meaning of the long-standing expression: “sola Scriptura”. Despite being an ancient Latin expression, it bears one of the fundamental truths of our protestant identity, which offers us very useful, practical applications for our everyday lives.

When we declare: “Scriptures only”, we affirm that we believe in its authority, clarity, sufficiency, necessity and its perfection. The Reformation Fathers were dealing with a medieval Church that had slipped into only granting partial authority to Scripture and adding to its ecclesiastic traditions. It had granted the same authority to ecclesiastic traditions and Scripture. Facing this fact, Luther wanted to return to the Word alone as the sole divine authority. This was the beginning of a long sequence of understanding as consequences.

It is the unique authority of Scripture that led the Reformation Fathers to declare that “Scripture is its only interpreter.” As F. Hammann emphasizes:

This interpretative principle clearly illustrates the Reformation Fathers' attitude about the Holy Scriptures, highlighting the clarity and self-sufficiency of the Biblical revelation. It also emphasizes that no human authority can be the judge of the Holy Scriptures, since it is in the mystery of inspiration and through the human authors' achievements, of divine origins. Of course, this doesn't mean that all Scripture's passages are clear and easily understood; this means that it is within the Scripture that one must seek the texts' meaning, which appears obscure to our limited and fallen understanding. It should be noted that even this understanding of Sola Scriptura implies the respect of Tota Scriptura, that it is necessary to take into account the Biblical revelation as a whole in the Christian doctrine's establishment. (In this particular context, we could also speak of the analogy of Scripture and the Faith.)

This truth led the Reformation Fathers to speak about the Gospel as the hermeneutic key of the Scriptures. The Gospel allows us to understand Scripture's emphasis on salvation through Jesus Christ. Indeed, the rule that states “Scripture is its own interpreter” implies that the Biblical text presents not only facts, but also interpreted facts. Thus, we cannot use verses as we please, indiscriminately, and the text must be respected without neglecting the eschatological key, which remains essential to it: Christ's death and resurrection. (Christ-centered historical and redemptive hermeneutic.)

A Major Implication

Several implications could result from what has just been stated. Let's choose one.

In an attempt to ensure that the catholic tradition is not given more authority than the evangelical tradition, some believers consider that not using any tools for Scripture interpretation is more spiritual. A quiet moment in the Word seems purer without any human influence. Our Reformation Fathers did not agree with such a thought. To the contrary, for them, as well as for us, our Word's appreciation needs to be within the Church and its 2000-year history. The fact that we need to examine our interpretation of the Scripture with the teachings of those believers who have gone before us, and with the aid of contemporary tools, doesn't deny the SOLA SCRIPTURA. To the contrary, this prevents us from relying on our own interpretation alone, which can produce unfortunate results for our own spiritual growth and, at times, for an entire congregation. “Scripture only” does not mean “only Scripture”.

“Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good,” (1 Thess. 5:20-21). Don't deprive yourself of the remarkable richness that the Holy Spirit left us throughout the church's history so that we may enjoy this unmistakably, extraordinary BOOK.

—François served for 15 years in pastoral ministry before joining the SEMBEQ team as Executive Director, and, more recently as President. He has been married to Nathalie for 25 years and has two children, Andrea and Samuel.

