

Personal bible reading

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[0:00] Here is Discipleship 101. I looked up where the 101 comes from in the American University System. Course 101 is the introductory course at beginners level. So this is a sort of introductory course to being a Christian.

Not becoming a Christian so much as being a Christian. So the talks are going to be about what we would call discipleship. Why do that? Because when somebody becomes a Christian, that is just the beginning.

There is the matter of going on from having become a Christian to living the Christian life and growing as a Christian. And in shorthand we're saying that that's being a disciple.

So it's not a one-off thing. You become a Christian and that's it. A bit like having an MMR vaccination. You've had it. I mean I don't even remember whether I had a...

Would I have had an MMR? I guess I would have done. I've forgotten. And you know, I just carry on anyway. Becoming a Christian is not like that.

[1:17] It is more like entering a relationship. It's more like getting married. You begin a lifelong relationship and that relationship needs tending and maintaining and can develop and grow.

And the people in it can develop and grow. And that's what being a Christian is like. Or it's more like that. So, let me just break off a moment.

Is my voice coming and going in different volumes? I don't know why because I'm speaking the same volume and it was the same with you, wasn't it? Let's just... I will just carry on.

As long as you can hear me, that's the main thing. Yeah. So, often when we preach, we invite people to come to Jesus Christ.

And that's the right thing to do. To come for the first time from being separate to Jesus to coming into a relationship with him through faith. But there's more.

[2:18] So, Colossians 4 writes, he says, continue to live your lives in him. And what he actually says is walk in him.

Rooted and built up in Jesus Christ. That seems to have the idea of going on and developing, doesn't it? In the text that Arsema read, Jesus says to his disciples, if you abide in me and I abide in you, you will bear much fruit.

So, this idea of being fruitful in the Christian life. And Jesus wants his followers to be fruitful. Well, putting it another way, from the beginning of Mark's gospel.

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. Jesus seeing these guys.

And he says to them, come, follow me. Jesus said, and I will make you fishers of men. At once they left their nets and followed him.

[3:29] So, there's the idea of not just coming to him and then leaving, but coming and following. Following and following and following. And Jesus says, I will make you into something that you weren't before.

So, we take these ideas of living in him, walking in him, being built up in him. Or this idea of abiding in him, bearing fruit, bearing more fruit.

Or following and continuing to follow. And being made into something that we weren't before. All of these ideas is what we're trying to get at in this idea of discipleship and going on with the Lord.

So, how do we do that? How to follow. How to continue. How to grow. Have I switched off altogether now?

I'll keep going. How to be fruitful. So, if you're a Christian, I think we ought to be asking that. How can I grow?

[4:38] How can I stay close to the Lord? How can I be fruitful? How can I be fruitful? And a simple answer. Like any relationship, there's a two-way conversation and a response of behavior.

So, anybody humanly that you've got to know, you will have got to know by talking to them, listening to them, and modifying your behavior in accordance.

So, how are you? I'm fine. Shall we go for a walk? Yeah, let's go for a walk. I don't know. That's a little conversation in which you might get to know somebody.

And that's not a bad thought for the Christian. We listen to God, and he speaks to us through the Bible. We speak to God in prayer.

In that listening and speaking, there is the aspect of faith, which is, I guess it's not quite the same or to the same degree in a sort of human relationship.

[5:48] But here, faith is very important. And obeying. Trust and obey. There's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey. And these are sort of basic ideas of the Christian life.

Walking with him. So, this morning, we're going to be looking at particularly listening to God's word. I remember a preacher from South Wales, and I wish I could remember exactly what he said. He said, today I'm going to tell you how you can be the most excellent Christian.

How you can find the presence of God. How you can be transformed in your life. And he built it up so much, you think, wow, he's going to sell us something really big.

What's he going to say is the answer. And he said, and the way to do it is this. Read your Bible, pray every day, pray every day, pray every day. Read your Bible, pray every day.

[6:48] Or something like that. And it's actually a very simple thing to how to live the Christian life. And I'd just like to pick up on that. There's more to it. But this is at least a simple start, isn't it?

Read your Bible, pray every day. That's what I'm going to say. And there is a thing that Christians in the 20th and 21st century call the quiet time.

And you think, what is a quiet time? What do they do? Just sit in a corner and sort of be quiet? It's a label for the idea of spending 10 or 15 or 20 minutes reading your Bible and praying.

And people call it a quiet time. And I'm going to try and encourage us to have a quiet time. But I'm doing so very conscious of, is this actually in the Bible?

Does the Apostle, well, I've got it here. Is this right? Or is this just a 20th, 21st century thing that people have just invented?

[7:59] I mean, would Moses have said, read your Bible, pray every day? Would David have said it? Would Jesus have said this? Would the Apostle Paul have said this? So what I'd like to do, I mean, it's nothing very spectacular.

Just to look at what these people did say on this subject, that we might just take what the Bible says and try to apply it in our lives.

So answer number one, none of these people would have said, read your Bible. Because the idea of having a Bible, a printed Bible, is a very modern thing.

Printing was invented in 1455. I did the maths on my computer. That's 568 years ago. 568 years of the 2,023 years that there has been Christianity.

Only in the last, that number, have people been, have there been printed Bibles available to have. And the idea of having your own printed Bible is a magnificent, amazing, modern thing.

[9:17] I mean, how privileged we are. We've got Bibles, I was going to say, coming out of our ears, but we've got lots of different versions of the Bible. You can get Bibles on the Internet. You can get Bibles on your phone.

And they didn't have that in the days of Paul. Not everybody would have had a Bible. There would have been copies of the Scriptures, probably kept centrally.

In the local synagogue, the scrolls of all the prophets would have been the most treasured possession. I mean, that's where they were. They would have been in the synagogue.

Now, that's not to say that people didn't know the Scriptures, but the honest truth is they didn't have their own personal printed copy the way we do.

So, what did they do? And what did they say? So, let's look. Let's ask Abraham, how did you live your life?

[10:18] And let's read in Genesis chapter 15, verse 4. Was God's Word any part of your life?

What did it mean to you? Was yours a faith that had to do with listening to God or anything like that? Excuse me.

So, Abraham. In Genesis 15, verse 4, Abraham was childless and God spoke to him.

The word of the Lord came to Abraham. This servant of yours will not be your heir. A son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.

God took him outside and said, Look up at the sky and count the stars, if indeed you can count them. And he said to him, So shall your offspring be.

[11:27] And Abraham believed the Lord and he credited it to him as righteousness. Crucial text.

Look up at the sky and look at the stars. So shall your offspring be. So here's, how did Abraham do his spiritual life?

God spoke to him. That's right, isn't it? The word of the Lord came to him. How important was that?

It was of absolutely overwhelming importance. What did he have to do with God's word? God said to him, At the moment you don't have any children, but let me tell you in the future, your offspring will be as many as these stars.

Do you believe me? And Abraham heard God's word, heard that promise, and believed it. And God said, That's it.

[12:41] You are a believer. In my book, you are righteous. If you're a person believing me in my book, I'm on your side. You're my friend.

That believing of God's word was absolutely crucial to Abraham. There's a model for us there, because as the Apostle Paul tells us, that Christians are children of Abraham, if we walk in the footsteps of faith that Abraham had.

In other words, we're in the same position that we hear God's word, his promises, and we believe them, and we are counted as righteous.

So, although Abraham wouldn't have said, Read your Bible, don't pray every day, he would have said, I can't live unless I know God's promise, and I live by faith in what he's told me.

And I think that's very important. He heard God's word, he believed the promise, and that was the basis of his relationship. The Apostle Paul says, We're in much the same position.

[13:54] He doesn't promise us that our offspring will be as many as the stars in the sky, but he makes promises to us through Jesus Christ, who died on the cross and rose again, and our faith is in him, and we walk by faith in his word.

Somewhere, and I didn't find exactly where Calvin had said this, on the matter of Abraham, he said, That's how he lived his life. God offered him his bare word, and that single promise was sufficient for Abraham to live his life.

For many years, he just had a sort of the bare promise of God. So, here's what Abraham says, he doesn't say, read your Bible, pray every day, but he does say, the only way I can live the life of faith is by hearing what God said, grabbing onto it, and living accordingly.

So, I think that's significant. Let's ask Moses. Moses, what would you say about the word of God?

So, I'm going now to Deuteronomy chapter 6 and verse 7.

What would you say, how do you think the word of God interacts with the life of people on earth?

[15:25] So, I've got this, which I put up on the screen and I'll read it. Deuteronomy chapter 6 verse 4 says, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts, impress them on your children, talk about them when you sit at home, when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Tie them as symbols on your hands, bind them on your foreheads, write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates. So, printing hadn't been invented in the time of Moses, but he does say the words of this law are to be known publicly and you are to saturate your life with what God has said.

These commandments I give you today are to be on your hearts. So, it's got to go down deep into you. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road.

So, in your ordinary life, God's word should be sort of in the atmosphere of conversation and of thought and in the, and everything. And I put there, he would encourage us to non-stop exposure to and saturation with God's words.

[17:10] He says somehow write them on your, on your hands. Just when you're doing stuff be reminded of God's words and on your foreheads and when you're thinking of stuff God's words should be sort of governing your mind and when you go into your house and when you go out of your house you're reminded of God's word because it's as it were either literally or metaphorically written on the doorposts.

And incidentally he says that this is should be part of family life and everyday life. He doesn't say read your Bible pray everyday but he does say that doesn't he?

God's word should saturate your life. And I could ask and how are we going to respond to that?

What are we going to do that we should have the same blessing and the same way of living?

What habits shall we have? What method shall we have to saturate our lives with God's word? And then I'm going to ask I'm sorry it's coming and going isn't it?

Psalms 1 so let's ask the psalmist so you don't have a printed Bible psalmist but what do you say about God's word about the revelation of God's word and this is Psalm 1 and he says he begins with a blessing blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers but whose delight is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on his law day and night that person is like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season whatever he does prospers so this is going to be a lot easier for us who do have a Bible but even the psalmist says what's the secret of living a life that is fruitful and

[19:23] God honouring and pleasant and right well there's some things to avoid behaviour he says you're avoiding walking in step with the wicked or standing in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers so there's something negative there to avoid but on the positive he says see how precious is the instruction of the Lord your delight in the law of the Lord you meditate on it day and night lot easier for us if we've got a Bible isn't it to meditate on it day and night and there's a promise attached he says the person who does this is like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season does it say does not wither or have missed that out but the idea of a tree which doesn't dry up but keeps going and produces fruit at the right time he says well that's the person who has this relationship with the word of

God delights in it and meditates on it delight meaning it's not a chore oh dear I've got to read my bible now there's a delighting and this idea of meditating I guess it can include if you didn't have a bible what you'd memorised or what you'd heard on Sunday but to think about it to find a way of perhaps if you've got other people in your house to say can you remember what was said on Sunday or how does this text go or something like that to meditate to mull over to chew over to consider I think I'm correct in saying it's the same word in Psalm 2 as the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain they think about it and chew things over and make plans so the psalmist would say that's the secret of a fruitful life delighting in the law of the

Lord and meditating on it day and night now let's ask Jesus what would you say if I can reverently put it that way of course in the time of Jesus there wasn't a printed Bible but he does say this and our seminar read it to us I am the vine you are the branches if you remain in me and I in you you will bear much fruit apart from me you can do nothing so Jesus ties this fruitfulness very much to himself personally but notice how he does it if you remain in me this is verse seven now and my words remain in you ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you this is to my father's glory that you bear much fruit so

Jesus says it's not a mechanical thing the more words you read the more holy you're going to get it's a personal thing it's to do with me says the Lord Jesus you need to be abiding in me and I need to be abiding in you but he does say you can't do it without his words if my words remain in you and he noticed how he he also links up with prayer if my words remain in you ask whatever you wish so here here abiding in the Lord with his words abiding in us living a life of prayer and it actually goes on to talk about a life of obedience as well so here's fruitfulness now Christian would you like to be fruitful yeah!

The Lord Jesus is central without a relationship with him we can't be fruitful just by trying our best or doing some rules or even if they're good rules like just praying for 30 minutes a day or something unless it's to do with him it doesn't get us anywhere apart from me you can do nothing Jesus himself is central prayer is essential obedience is essential but Jesus words are essential whoever is ashamed of me and my words says Jesus I will be ashamed of him when my father comes in the time of his glory I have a friend who is asking they might even watch this about the place of God's word in the Christian life and I think as we build up this picture as we've been doing this morning we can't live the

[24:48] Christian life without God's word can we it's just an impossibility and how grateful we should be that we have God's word and what a privilege to have our own copy that we can read any time we want yeah let's use it I think is what I'm trying to say let's find a way of doing this in our lives I ask again what would Jesus say in Matthew chapter 5 this is a sermon on the mount back in the mid 20th century it used to be said I don't really like any of this enthusiastic Christianity or born again Christianity just give me the sermon on the mount never really held water even in the mid 20th century but anyway here's the sermon on the mount Matthew chapter 5 and you notice that the sermon is words when

Jesus blesses people chapter 5 verse 4 blessed are the poor in spirit he doesn't do a sort of jedi thing where he waves his hands and conveys a blessing by jedi!

magic he does it by words blessed are the poor in spirit when the sower goes out to sow he sows the word doesn't he and notice Jesus high view of the old testament scriptures chapter 5 verse 17 do not think I have come to abolish the law of the prophets I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them for truly I tell you unless heaven and earth disappear not the smallest letter not the least stroke of a pen will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished so he's saying that Jesus view of the scriptures that the Hebrew scriptures are the word of God which which can't be broken he says this is another place that's what the

Hebrew scriptures are they will not be abolished but fulfilled and that's typical of Jesus high view of the Old Testament scriptures and interestingly Jesus also has a very high view of his own words you have heard it said verse 22 but I tell you and I was going to go through and underline every time he said I tell you but I never got round to it Jesus is a person who says this is what it says in the Bible that will never be broken that will be fulfilled and here am I telling you you get to pick up the sense of Jesus own personal authority as speaking words that will never fail speaking words of power words of truth words of life these are the words of the Lord Jesus I tell you and perhaps a rather graphic way of explaining that or bringing it home is at the end of the!

Sermon on the mount where he does the one about the man who built his house on the sand and the one who built his house on the rock it's a standard Sunday school picture isn't it the wise man built his house upon the rock the foolish man built his house upon the sand now what happens next the waves came up and the house on the sand went splat or whatever it says in your version splat it's a wonderful you can sort of make it into a lovely children's song but let's get at what it's actually yeah it is but notice what it's actually about it's about people's lives being totally ruined or totally secure and

[29:22] Jesus puts it at the end as really quite a solemn statement really he says there is a way that you think you're fine but when it comes to it when the storm of judgment comes your life will be ruined your life will be completely splattered and he says well what will do that it's to do with his words and he says there is a way that on that last tremendous day when there is the pressure of judgment and the

solemnity of God examining each person's life that on that day you will be secure your house will stand firm and gloriously firm and he says and what's the difference both of these people hear Jesus words but one of them does them the one who hears these words of mine and does them is like a wise man who built his house on the rock do you notice how crucial Jesus words are and how crucial it is to take them seriously in faith in obedience in every way that's a proper response to what he said Jesus doesn't read your Bible pray every day but he says listen to what I say and take it so seriously know what I've said take it so seriously that you do it because otherwise there is no way back from ruin that's how seriously Jesus takes his words the crucial nature of his words and the crucial nature of taking seriously what he says so again I ask where are we on this it is possible I guess to get into a Christian doldrums where we we're not that bothered what God says in his word we're too busy pressures of life too much and it all becomes rather distant and it all becomes rather unreal and Jesus says that's a place of real danger because you need to be hearing my words meditating on everything that God has said and you need to be doing it yeah thank God that we've got a Bible we have what he said we can read it all we can take it all in it amazing what would the apostles say read your Bible pray every day the apostles let me just explain are Jesus authorized spokespeople spokesmen apostle means sent one and Jesus specifically arranged his twelve apostles he taught them he gave them training and they were with him sort of non-stop for three years and he commissioned them and told them they could write down what he'd said they would remember it and write it all down so what do the apostles say about this they're the first believers at the birth of the

Christian church let's look at Acts chapter 2 how did the Christian church begin what sort of things were going on then in Acts chapter 2 this is when Jesus hadn't long been crucified and raised from the dead and the people who had called out for his crucifixion probably were still there in Jerusalem and on the day of Pentecost in this Acts chapter 2 the Apostle Peter stands up and says do you realize what a huge mistake you made crucifying Jesus do you realize what an appalling error you made that this Jesus whom you crucified you don't see him anymore because he's in heaven and the reason the Holy Spirit has come is because he being exalted to the right hand of God has received from the Father what you now see and hear!

who he is the Lord has made this man whom you crucified both Lord and Christ and when they hear this they're cut to the heart how could we possibly have made such a huge appalling mistake this will finish us forever and then Peter says amazingly but you can be forgiven if you repent and are baptized you will receive in the name of the Lord Jesus you will get the forgiveness of the sins and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit even you and that's just an amazing thing and 5,000 was it 5,000 or 3,000 were added to their number that day but my point is they heard a message and believed it's in verse 37 the people heard this they heard words they heard a message and in verse 40 with many other words he warned them and pleaded with them and in verse 41 those who accepted his word so you see the word here is absolutely crucial how does

[35:05] Christianity how is it conveyed how is it caught how is it spread by the word by the message which the apostles were preaching and interestingly once there is a little community of believers well it's quite a big community isn't it 3,000 in verse 42 what instinctively do they do verse 42 act 2 42 they devoted themselves so there's a strong commitment here they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship to the breaking of bread and to prayer so if you'd ask them how do you live your Christian life they'd say well wish we had a Bible because we could read the Bible every day but we do pray every day and we devote!

ourselves to the apostles teaching we get as much of that as we possibly can they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and the breaking of bread and prayer so their faith came through the word and their discipleship is through devotion to the apostolic word and I'm making this point that the discipleship and the word we I mean if we can read our Bibles and pray every day we're on the right track aren't we if we can devote ourselves to the apostles teaching that way and thank God we've got a Bible we've got everything that the apostles said how privileged we are you know the church at Corinth probably just had the letter to the Corinthians but we've got the whole lot

I mean not trying to go into how the New Testament was formed but I think that when the apostles wrote stuff down people said this is what we need they haven't got this at Colossae let's send a copy to them and so a body of scripture was accumulated I mean it wasn't done all overnight but we now have the full record of what of the Old Testament of what Jesus said and what the apostles taught and we can read it amazing Paul says to the Colossians let the word of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms hymns and spiritual songs singing to God with gratitude in your heart and he says when we go to the assembly at Colossae what I'd like is as soon as I get in that door somebody is saying something from scripture and when I hear you singing you're singing something of the message of Christ of the word of

Christ maybe you're singing a reflection on what he did maybe you're singing an Old Testament psalm maybe somebody's made something up this week that's about Jesus Christ your assembly should be full of that word the word of Christ dwell among you richly he says I've got a sad recollection which is that we went to a church and I'm sure they're lovely believing people we were on our travels we went to a church and it was three quarters of an hour from the beginning before we ever heard anything from the Bible I was very sad about that I was very sad about that let the word of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms and hymns and spiritual songs we've sung a psalm this morning haven't we singing to God with gratitude in your heart so here's the apostle

Paul and he says let this word dwell in you richly that's the way you're going to grow he doesn't say read your Bible pray every day but I'm not quite sure how they would have the word of Christ dwell in them richly if they didn't do something like that and we have got a Bible we can go home and read it and we can bring something back that has encouraged us and we can share it well what about us so in conclusion I've come to faith in Jesus how can I grow how can I continue in him how can I grow in him and Abraham would say do you know the promises that God has spoken are so precious I live my life trusting in God's promises that shaped my life you got a Bible you could do the same and Moses would say back in my day I told people to talk about the

[40:08] God's word when they were at home when they were doing the washing up when they were going along in the car singing Christian songs and things and at the meal table and in the morning and at night I told them to have God's word in that and you got a Bible wow you can do that too and the psalmist would say the way the way of the spiritual life is to certainly to avoid things but to take delight in the law of the Lord and to meditate on it day and night you guys have got the whole thing wow you are so privileged you could be doing that I haven't even mentioned Psalm 119 which is all about God's word what would the father say on the mount of transfiguration about the words of Jesus there's Moses right on Moses there's Elijah good for you

Elijah here is my son listen to him that's what the father would say to us here's my son are we listening to him and Jesus would say look my words are life and truth and spirit and if you've got them which you have in your Bible wow eat them be saturated with them hearing my word and doing it is the difference between heaven and hell between life and death between glory and ruin that's how important it is and as I've said the apostle would say guys let the word of Christ dwell in you richly you haven't just got the letters of the Colossians you got the whole thing wow how richly the word of God could dwell amongst!

you so I think read your Bible pray every day isn't such a bad summary and if you're not happy with that find another way to have your life full of God's word but find some way to do it in terms of advice I think setting aside a time is helpful setting aside a regular time is helpful I think habit is helpful a lot of people find that morning is a good time to read the Bible to get it into us and if you're going to try and read in the morning the sad reality is that the fight to get that happening is actually the fight to go to bed at a reasonable time which we sometimes win and sometimes lose

I think we've got enormous amount of help to read the Bible you just ask somebody else next to you if they read the Bible if they find anything helpful I mean I'm not going to prescribe this is what you should do but there are an enormous amount of helps there are Bible notes you can get them written a little passage to read every day and some explanation suitable to whatever level of Bible knowledge you have there are deep theological books you could ask Jerome about that couldn't

you there are study aids there's concordances references and all sorts of things like that all sorts of ways that you can get into the Bible different things work for different people but I would say just do it find some way of fulfilling the things that Moses and Abraham and Jesus and the psalmist said you can get phone apps I've got my Bible reading notes on my phone but I have to say I don't always find it successful because I get ding like that and I get distracted so easily this is me maybe you're different but I mean if you can manage a phone without getting distracted you can have the whole Bible on your phone and everything and I would say and this perhaps is relevant if people are watching on the internet being in a Bible soaked fellowship is really important this is never meant to be done sort of as a lone ranger you know you're supposed to be in a community of people we encourage one another let the word of Christ dwell among you richly it's a fellowship thing and if you're watching if you happen to be watching this at any time on YouTube and you're just trying to live the Christian life on your own and tune in on the telly every now and again that is a very difficult way to live the Christian life it's not meant to be done like that get yourself into a [45:15] Bible soaked fellowship so I hope that's helpful I hope that encourages us and may each of us be people who continue in Christ who walk in Christ rooted and built up in Christ fruitful for him in all these ways with the word of the Lord Jesus abiding us and being to hear the Father's glory Amen Amen we're going to sing a little bit of Psalm 119 a ending Thank you.